

HUMORISTS' NARRATIVES ON SOCIAL ROLE OF HUMOR IN TURKEY IN A
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

HUMORISTS' NARRATIVES ON SOCIAL ROLE OF HUMOR IN TURKEY IN A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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This dissertation analyzes the social role of humor in Turkish society through the narratives of a collection of prominent humorists. The comprehensive field research is conducted with 48 humorists encompassing ages 30 to 74 involved in humor magazines, theatre, cinema, television, radio, social media and writing across all mediums. It contributes to the sociological knowledge base by exploring how humor's social role changes and shifts within the humorists' narratives, depending on the sociopolitical context of Turkish society throughout the last 35 years - from 1980 to 2015.

During the field research and data interpretation, an intricate web of cross-links between different thematic narratives was observed. The study found that the humorists focused on four major themes when interviewed on the social role of humor in Turkey. These themes are 1) humor as opposition, rebellion and freedom of expression; 2) humor as a witty defense mechanism; 3) humor as therapy, hope and survival, and finally 4) humor as self-reflection, communication & community formation.

For theoretical context, and to read the meaning of their narrations, the study relied upon social theories of humor, in addition to a qualitative methodology. The thesis argues that humorists' narratives on the social role of humor in Turkey coincide with the two main approaches to humor from the literature; namely the functionalist approach and the conflict approach. Social theories of humor, including superiority, incongruity and relief theories, surfaced in the narrations of humorists, which are influenced by the changing sociopolitical context of the country.

Keywords: Social Role of Humor, Narrative Research, Turkey, Social Resistance, Humor Theories

ÖZ

TARİHSEL PERSPEKTİFTEN TÜRKİYE’DE MİZAHIN SOSYAL ROLÜ ÜZERİNE MİZAHÇILARIN ANLATILARI

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Bu tez çalışması önde gelen bir grup mizahçının anlatıları üzerinden Türkiye’de mizahın rolünü analiz etmektedir. Geniş kapsamlı saha çalışması, yaşları 30 ile 74 arasında değişen ve mizah dergileri, tiyatro, sinema, televizyon, radyo, sosyal medya gibi mecralarda yazan, çizen, oynayan ve üreten 48 mizahçıyla gerçekleştirilmiştir. Sosyoloji bilgi tabanına katkısı, son 35 yılda – 1980 ile 2015 yılları arasında- Türkiye’nin değişen sosyopolitik ortamında, mizahçıların, mizahın sosyal rolüne ilişkin anlatılarının nasıl değişip dönüştüğünü göstermektedir.

Gerek saha çalışması esnasında, gerekse verileri yorumlarken, farklı tematik anlatılar arasında girift bir ilişkisellik ağı ve bağlantılar tespit edilmiştir.

Çalışmanın bulguları, mizahçıların anlatılarını dört ana tema üzerine kurduklarını ortaya koymaktadır. Bu temalar, 1) muhalefet, başkaldırı ve ifade özgürlüğü olarak mizah; 2) zekice bir savunma mekanizması olarak mizah; 3) terapi, umut ve hayatta kalma aracı olarak mizah; ve son olarak 4) özüne bakış içeren, iletişim ve bağ kuran tarafla mizah olarak belirlenmiştir.

Teorik çerçeve ve anlatıların anlamını okuyabilmek amacıyla, sosyal mizah teorilerinden faydalanılmış ve niteliksel metodoloji yöntemleri kullanılmıştır. Bu doktora tezinin temel savı, mizahçıların Türkiye’de mizahın sosyal rolüne ilişkin anlatılarının literatürdeki iki temel yaklaşım olan işlevsel yaklaşım ve çatışma yaklaşımı ile örtüştüğüdür. Üstünlük, uyumsuzluk ve rahatlama gibi sosyal mizah teorileri, mizahçıların anlatılarında yüzeye çıkmakta ve bu anlatılar büyük ölçüde ülkenin değişen sosyopolitik ortamından etkilenmektedirler.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Mizahın Sosyal Rolü, Anlatısal Araştırma, Türkiye, Sosyal Direniş, Mizah Teorileri

To the humorists in Turkey
who bring us laughter and joy

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The smell of stale cigarette smoke catches you immediately once you enter Nefes, a long-established joint always popular with the younger student crowd and left-leaning folks looking for action along Ankara's lively Sakarya Street. Well-known for holding events, talks and concerts, that night Nefes stage hosted Yüksel Aksu, an award-winning comedy filmmaker of Turkey. His talk initially focused on the Anatolian geography's rich heritage of humor, a land where Aristophanes plays were written, Bektaşî anecdotes were told and Nasreddin Hoca, one of the world's greatest humorists, wandered the land amazing everyone with his tremendous wit.

In the middle of the Aksu's talk, tension filled the room. It came from a question raised by a man in his 30s, who looked like a frequenter of Nefes. Having watched Aksu's latest movie *Entelköy Efeköye Karşı*, the man disputed the film's depiction of intellectuals and villagers and how he thought the director undervalued both groups.

For some background, *Entelköy Efeköye Karşı* turns the familiar and predictable idea of "the movement/migration from rural to urban" upside

down by making a group of ecologist intellectuals settle in an Aegean village to establish an organic farm. The intellectuals eventually protest the construction of a thermal power plant as the movie provides funny episodes that explore the clash of mentalities between the villagers and ecologists. This all takes place against the backdrop of 21st Century trends, such as environmental concerns, urban alienation and the urge to escape to a natural life.

The 30-something Nefes regular asking the question was not content with the portrayal of villagers as greedy and willing to let the natural beauty of the village be destroyed for money. He argued that the movie showed them as more interested in selling their land than preserving their own cultural heritage. As the film unfolds, the intellectuals become the ones defending the village against a potentially hazardous attempt to build a power plant, even though they only recently settled on the land.

After hearing the objection, Aksu argued that people who were offended by the story and its characters were dealing with a direct connection to Turkey's ancient comedy traditions – Hacıvat and Karagöz. These Ottoman figures represented the basic dualities of two different classes, cultures and worldviews. Karagöz, a mirror for the masses, expresses the desires, needs and discontentment of the common people against the rulers. On the other hand, Hacıvat the prototype of the well-educated, conformist and pragmatic elite represented ruling class values.

Aksu looked out across the crowd gathered at Nefes and explained that

maybe the audience was reluctant to acknowledge that Hacivat representing the ecologists, had an upper hand over Karagöz, the villagers. Some in the audience, he explained, might see this as going against the gut feeling and expectations of the majority of the audience in Turkey.

That night, his words made me question what social role and function humor performs in Turkish society. I considered how the parallel lines of ancient conflict in society were still being reflected onto humor production. Similar social dynamics continued to prevail in the same geography centuries after. I was especially curious about how the humorists themselves reflect on their work and the impact of sociopolitical context on their humor production. That night I began the journey of this dissertation.

1.1. THE MAIN THESIS

This dissertation will analyze the social role and functions of humor in Turkish society through the narratives of a collection of prominent humorists across a variety of genres. As most academic studies on humor have been written from the perspective of psychology or philosophy, this study is unique because it engages the field of sociology to delve into the perspectives of this specific professional group. This work aims to provide fresh insights into Turkish society by applying a discourse analysis on the narratives of humorists in a historical perspective.

This study is based on the collective accounts and experiences of a diverse group of humorists encompassing age 30 to 74, and also genre (humor magazines, theatre, cinema, television, radio, social media and writing across

all mediums). The information was gathered over an almost 24-month long period. In-depth interviews were conducted across Turkey with 48 humorists and covered issues of creativity and craft, boundaries of expression, taboos, as well as humor's role and function within society. This variety among the respondents increased the richness and diversity of the data collection process.

This research does not claim to present an objective account and evaluation on humor in Turkey by examining the humorous works themselves. On the contrary, this thesis is interested and will focus on understanding the intricacies of humorists' narrations on the social role and function of humor. It aims to make a textured sociological reading of the continuities and ruptures in the narratives placing them in a historical perspective and found four dominant themes regarding the social roles and functions of humor in Turkey.

1.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

At the beginning of the research, the following research questions were formulated to present a guideline for the thesis work, as well as contributing to the preparation of the actual interview questions.

- How do humorists describe the social role of humor in Turkey in their narrations?
- How do the humorists' narratives reflect on the impact of sociopolitical context on their humor production and humor's social role in Turkey?

This sociological study seeks to answer these research questions using a qualitative methodology to gather an in-depth understanding of the main ideals; intentions, obstacles, and political repression experienced by the producers of humor works in Turkey. Their common feature is being involved in the creation, production or execution of humorous content since 1970s.

1.3. KEY CONCEPTS

This section addresses the key concepts that this thesis will revolve around. After defining the theoretical debates briefly on the key concept of "social role of humor & satire", the main themes emerging out of field work during this research will be taken up as subsequent key concepts: 1) humor as an oppositional force in society, 2) humor as expression in a witty manner, 3) humor as an anti-depressant and therapy mechanism, and 4) humor facilitating community formation.

The Social Role of Humor & Satire

For the sake of clarity, the definition of "humor" used in this study is borrowed from Eric Weitz: "*a social transaction between two people, such as a performer or writer and audience, where one party intends to make the other party amused and invoke laughter.*" Adding on to the definition of Weitz, in this study, humor will be understood and used as "a means of interpreting social phenomena through a critical, witty and satirical approach."

Satire is defined by the Oxford British dictionary as "the use of humour,

irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices, particularly in the context of contemporary politics and other topical issues". An important feature of satire is strong irony or sarcasm, combined with a critique of human behavior to encourage social change. Laughter is not even deemed as an essential component of satire, whose aim is beyond being solely "funny" (Weitz, 2009:2). Satire may present means of resistance to a hegemonic and repressive presence, as well as the impositions of the status quo.

Dating back to the Greek God of Wine, the Dionysus's festivals in ancient times, satire was used as a form of theatre that questioned and criticized society. Many of the highlights of Western literature, art and drama have used sharp, powerful humor to challenge the status quo. Examples include the comedies of Aristophanes, carnivals of the middle ages, the Decameron of Boccaccio, Rabelais, Shakespeare and Cervantes's works, Moliere's comedies in 17th century, and Dickens, Shaw, Chekhov, Gogol and Wilde towards the end of 19th century. More recently, the dark humor in the works of surrealists, Beckett and Ionesco were reactions to the alienation brought about by the limitless modernization of the 20th century (Avci, 2003).

It wasn't until the 20th century that sociology broadened its scope of interest to include an "unserious" topic such as humor. While sociology as a discipline developed a flexibility to focus on the "micro-reality of everyday life", it still preserved an overall tendency to link these issues to greater social transformations. In the meantime, the social nature and role/function of humor were addressed by other disciplines, such as philosophy,

anthropology and psychology. Since the 1970s onwards, there was a significant increase in sociological interest in humor (Kuipers, 2008). The three classical theories on humor, which precede academic disciplinary specialization, are superiority, incongruity and relief theories. Some of these theories date back to Ancient Greece. They will be explained in detail under the Theoretical Framework chapter.

Analyzing humor in terms of its social role, a number of approaches emerged in the 20th century including the functionalist approach; the conflict approach; the symbolic interactionist approach; the phenomenological approach; and the comparative-historical approach. For the purposes of this thesis, the first two approaches, namely the functionalist approach and the conflict approach will be briefly examined in this section.

The functionalist approach explains humor in terms of its social functions and its contribution to the maintenance of social order. Kuipers develops a three-fold division under the functionalist approach to humor. First of all, humor can serve the function of *relief* by providing a safety valve for the tension to be subdued. Bakhtin's carnival is an example of this function. As a ritual of reversal, it performs a tension-relieving mechanism.

The second function ascribed to humor is *social control* and exemplifies cases where humor is used to strengthen the already existing hierarchical order within the society. This function brings to mind Bergson's theory on humor and laughter as a social corrective: Society aims to avoid and tame characters not flexible enough to "fit in". As rigidity is not functional in the eyes of the

society, laughter performs a disciplinary function to discourage inelasticity.¹ People do not like to be laughed at, as they feel humiliated. Another example of maintaining social control through humor is “joking down” in a social group where everyone makes fun of the hierarchically inferior sub-group, as opposed to a superior. According to Coser, this type of joking reflects the social hierarchy and helps to maintain the social order by keeping people “in their place” (Kuipers, 2008: 369).

The third function of humor is regarded to be *social cohesion*, bringing people together, serving to create solidarity, as well as sharing experiences, and building an identity within the group. In her article on the cohesive functions of laughter, Coser wrote that “to laugh, or to occasion laughter through humor and wit, is to invite those present to come closer. Laughter and humor are indeed like an invitation, be it an invitation for dinner, or an invitation to start a conversation: it aims at decreasing social distance.” (Coser 1959: 172) The social cohesion function of humor has a flip side of excluding others who do not get the joke, or the ones who are the target of the joke.

The structural functionalist approach came under criticism in the 1950s and 1960s and these approaches focusing on aspects of humor enhancing social order enhancement were questioned as well. Instead, more context and content-based analysis was conducted to supplement the functionalist approaches. Therefore, multiple social roles and functions of humor were pronounced more in recent studies. Humor became to be perceived both as a “threat”, as well as a contributor to social order by way of expressing

¹ Both Bakhtin’s carnival and Bergson’s humor theory will be explained in detail under Theoretical Framework.

conflict, inciting resistance, insulting, ridiculing or satirizing others (Kuipers, 2008: 371). Thus, the functions of humor were evaluated to be not fixed but rather depend on the social context, type of relation, etc. In this context, the second approach to be explained in this section is conflict approach.

The conflict approach regards humor as a means of expressing discontent and associates it with social conflict. As opposed to functionalist approach viewing it through the lens of “venting off pressure”, the conflict approach evaluates humor’s social role to be a weapon and a defense mechanism, expressing resistance. Kuipers argues that this approach owes to Thomas Hobbes’ superiority theory, where humor emerges from sudden glory felt when we recognize our supremacy over others.

While some theorists argue that expressing dissent through humor only stabilizes conflictive situations, “cushioning the blows of cruel governments” not leading to any real change (Benton 1988: 54), others argue that it makes it possible to talk about the otherwise unspeakable and unquestioned matters (Goldstein 2003: 10).

In this study, the social role and function of humor is analyzed as a concept shaping the narratives of some of the most significant humorists in Turkey over the last 40 years. These narratives defining the social role of humor coincide with some of the approaches on the social role of humor explained above, as well as the theoretical discussions outlined in more detail under Chapter 3.

The main themes emerging from the field study will be taken up as the other key concepts in this study. Four main themes emerged on the social role and function of humor when the narratives of the humorists are analyzed comprehensively.

Humor as opposition, rebellion and freedom of expression

The most frequently enunciated social function of humor during the field research appeared to be humor acting as an *“oppositional force in society”*. This theme coincides broadly with the conflict approach outlined above. Out of 48 respondents, 27 asserted that this was the most important role of humor in Turkish society. The other subthemes that emerged under this title revolved around the key concept of “opposition” and included “being critical of the system”, “expressing resistance”, “pointing out the flaws in society and the parties in power”, “siding with the underdog”, and “rebellion”.

Opposition is a response to power that aims to challenge the rulers’ oppression and domination through the subthemes expressed above. I prefer to stick to these common themes and definitions that came up in the field research in the narratives of respondents. Therefore I define the main components of opposition as “criticism”, “resistance”, “pointing out mistakes”, “supporting the weak”, and “rebellion”. Oppression can take many forms, and what is considered oppression changes across time, as expressed in the narratives of humorists on “taboos” and “self-censorship”.

Humor as a witty defense

The second most frequent social role of humor emerged to be *“expression of feelings and thoughts in a witty manner”* and *“an intelligent tool for dealing with*

violent assaults and defending oneself". Among all respondents interviewed face to face, 35% (17 respondents) described "*expression of feelings and thoughts in a witty manner*" as one of the main functions of humor in Turkish society.

Other subthemes that emerged under this title can be summarized as "humor as a safety valve", "the exaltation and relief that someone finally voiced my concerns", almost a feeling of "revenge". On the other hand, 15% (6 respondents) defined the mission of humor as "*a tool for dealing with violent assaults and defending oneself*". All these subthemes that converged within the narratives indicate a similarity to the functionalist approach viewing it through the lens of "venting off pressure".

Humor as therapy, hope and survival

Humor serving as an anti-depressant and therapy mechanism may be regarded as another aspect of "venting off pressure". The third most frequent social role and function of humor in the narratives of the humorists were found out to be humor's "therapy" mission. Out of 48 respondents that participated in this study, 31% (15 respondents) stated that humor served as an anti-depressant & a therapy mechanism in Turkish society.

On a similar note, 23% (11 interviewees) argued that humor gave *strength, hope and a sense of carrying on* by creating *a breath of fresh air, a new way of looking at the world*. This theme coincides with the approaches that focus on humor's ability to stabilize and transform the anger in society, thus acting as a social control mechanism.

Humor as self-reflection, communication and community

The last theme that was identified in the accounts of the humorists is humor's self-deprecating and retrospective aspect. The theme of *self-reflection through humor* was raised by 11 of the respondents. This theme formed a unity of statements with themes, such as *humor being a tool for increasing social communication and tolerance* (8 respondents); as well as *humor facilitating the formation of a community through a strong fellow-feeling and common binding language among its audience* (13 respondents).

This theme has two dimensions: one occurring at the individual level and the other at the society level. The narratives revolving around the self-reflection aspect of humor (a personal maturity to reach the level of self-deprecation) generally intersected with the statements emphasizing the role of humor in increasing social cohesion (functional approach) through the formation of a common language; "the language of humor".

On the other hand, this creation of a community culture and common language also indicates the formation of an outside boundary, humor including and excluding at the same time. This theme in that context is in close interplay with the function of "opposition" and "resistance" as the exclusion often times in narratives comes across as targeting the oppressiveness of whoever is in power. When juxtaposed against each other, it becomes apparent that functionalist approach (social cohesion aspect) and the conflict approach (resistance, opposition) may very well coexist. Social cohesion in this context is not meant to cover the whole society. It rather indicates a segment of the population sharing similar values and aspiration

forge a bond through humor, which often times serves as a weapon to criticize the oppressive policies of power holders.

1.4. A PERIODIZATION BASED ON NARRATIVES

The analysis of the field of humor in Turkey give clues on the changing themes, ideas, and motivations in the narrations of people involved in the craft of humor making. The periodization of the thesis does not rest on an arbitrary choice but is rather based on the breaking points and discontinuities in the narrations of these humorists regarding history and their role in it per se.

As the research was conducted with three generations of humorists ranging between the ages of 30 to 74 (their birth dates ranging from 1941 to 1985), the period covered within this thesis is deliberately not limited to a certain predetermined time frame. It rather covered the time frame depicted in the narratives. However, it is important to point out that the humorous works produced by the narrators have been influential in the period from the 1970s up until today.

In this context, clear demarcation lines and breaking points have emerged in the narratives of the humorists that linked specific characteristics and roles of humor with significant historical events. For instance, 1980s coup d'état emerged as an inevitable breaking point in the narratives of the humorists, while they were defining their work within the context of political and social developments taking place in the country. In this period, the authoritarian rule of the military went hand in hand with economic liberalization and the

rise of Islamic values. It marked the beginning of an increasingly conservative political and social atmosphere, which had significant impacts on cultural production, including humor. This shift is inevitably witnessed in the narratives of the humorists.

Similarly, the Gezi Park protests of June 2013 emerged as a remarkable reference point enunciated by a majority of respondents. Turkey's June 2013 Gezi Park uprising created an unprecedented sense of community disputing the authority, through songs, poems, street art and humor. The use of critical humor by common people during the protests inspired hope and faith in humorists, who especially emphasized the role of humor as a change agent subverting the hegemonic discourse of those in power. Therefore, they referred to the Gezi Park uprising as a phenomenal social protest incorporating humor. In this context, this research focused on events that acquired meaning and power when referring to the changing social role of humor in the narratives of its creators. These events are analyzed as the determinants of an almost "organically emerging" periodization within the narratives of the interviewees.

1.5. THEORIES

Social theories of humor will provide the theoretical context in reading the meaning of narrations, which make up the universe of the social role and function of humor for the purposes of this research. These theories will be utilized in the thesis as far as their interpretations on the role of humor overlaps with the emerging themes from the actual narratives collected during field research.

The research questions on the social function and role of humor, which will be dealt in detail under methodology section, aims to uncover what the creators of humor perceive to be the main motives behind laughter. The statements gathered and analyzed within the research unquestionably reflected the respondents' subjective views on the nature and characteristics of the society they produce humor in and how it affects the role of humor, i.e. whether it functions as a change agent, or a pain killer.

The four predominant themes that came out of this research corresponded to one or more humor theories that reflected on the social role of humor. One of those theories is incongruity theory, which understands humor to function subversively. Many theorists, including Locke, Kant, and Schopenhauer wrote on incongruity theory of humor. According to Kant's work, humor derives from a culturally defined sense of reality that pre-exists it and which it seeks to twist and turn upside down. By revealing the incongruities in the everyday structures of power and their "naturalness", the comic can turn the familiar unfamiliar and create opportunities for critique. In this manner, humorists are thought to act as the comic doubles of critical philosophers, challenging the established norms of culture through "wit", rather than argumentation.

While incongruity theory will be analyzed in more detail under the chapter on "Theoretical Framework", this theory constituted an appropriate tool to decipher the second theme emerging out of the research, namely "*expression of feelings and thoughts in a witty manner*". It is fascinating to realize how

humorists' narratives on the social role of humor is influenced and even transformed parallel to the economic and social background that surrounds them.

For instance, the second theme, while on its own seems to fit in with the main premises of the incongruity theory, adopts some new functions in the context of Turkey. One of these functions taken up by humor creators in their discourse is humor being used as *"an intelligent tool for defending oneself against with violent assaults and repression"* in Turkey. While the core proposition of incongruity theory remains, the purpose for which this type of humor is utilized changes depending on the context.

Another major humor theory to be used within this thesis, superiority theory, is pioneered by Thomas Hobbes and defines humor as "a sudden glory felt when one recognizes his/her supremacy over others". Superiority theory also accounts for the ridicule of political figures as idiots, despots or freaks, especially in satirical cartoon magazines. During the analysis of the narratives on the social role and function of humor in Turkey, it is possible to detect traces of superiority theory. While this type of humor can manifest itself in different forms, one very common form of superiority humor mentioned in humor literature is jokes on raw racist and sexist mockery.

In Turkey, superiority humor undoubtedly manifests itself in those racist and sexist forms. However, this study only strives to analyze the narratives on the social roles of humor, and not the actual humor products that serve those roles. Therefore, it will limit itself to instances of "superiority humor"

in the narratives. The majority of narratives did not mention this type of humor while talking about the social role of humor.

The traces of superiority humor were identified in the narratives that focused on the social role of humor in “creating a shared sense of intellectual and cultural superiority between the audience and the creators of humor” (theme 4). For instance, in the case of satirical humor magazines in Turkey, subordinate groups who feel politically powerless experience a sense of temporary superiority by mocking and ridiculing the dominant political leader or group.

It is also important to point out the linkages and correlations between these two theories in the narratives. The shared sense of intellectual and cultural “superiority” among the consumers of humor undoubtedly derives from a sense of being “wittier” and more “intelligent” than their counterparts. This narrative is linked to the second theme of *“expression of thoughts and feelings in a witty manner”*. They are also both linked to the most frequent theme of the research: *“humor being an oppositional force in society”*.

The last humor theory applicable in the context of this thesis is the relief theory of Freud. According to Freud, the comic is an “unmasking”, a mechanism that allows a free discharge of impulses we daily have to repress. For him, a joke was inherently social; it actually is “the most social of all the mental functions that aim at a yield of pleasure.” (Freud, 2002: 238) Jokes and humor are significant mediums of these pleasurable escapes, rebelling against the disciplinary tendencies of society. The jokes tend to cluster

around sensitive topics, social prohibitions and taboos (Billig, 2005: 155).

Relief theory tangentially intersects with the third theme encountered during the interviews, i.e., humor serving as *an anti-depressant & a therapy mechanism* in Turkish society. In societies like Turkey, where the repressive tendencies of authorities and the conservative tendencies of the population are high, humor performs the role of an anti-depressant refining the darkness and sadness of life experiences. It serves the purpose of “taking off the steam” by providing a sense of relief. As opposed to Freud’s theory being focused more on the psychological and personal aspects of humor providing relief (such as sexual humor), the narratives in this thesis places the sense of relief in a social context; correlating it with themes such as humor giving *strength, hope and a sense of carrying on* by creating *a breath of fresh air, a new way of looking at things*.

1.6. THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY TO LITERATURE

The scholarly works in the field of humor in Turkey are individual studies addressing specific mediums such as theatre, comedy movies, and/or caricatures, which generally evaluates the contents of these products. There are several important scholarly works on traditional Turkish theatre including Metin And (1983)’s “Türk Tiyatrosunun Evreleri”, Sevda Şener’s books on theatre and several articles of Yavuz Pekman (2010) on folk humor and popular spectacle, as well as P. N. Boratav’s folk tales and Nasreddin Hoca.

In the area of political cartoons, an important historical analysis is provided

by Semih Balcıoğlu and Ferit Öngören; “50 Yılın Türk Mizah ve Karikatürü”, which covers the period 1923-1973. Other scholarly works include analysis of editorial, graphic humor by Turgut Çeviker, such as *Karikatürkiye I, II, III* (2011), as well as “Gelişim Sürecinde Türk Karikatürü” (1986) offer insights on the development of caricature culture in Turkey.

However, Çeviker’s work to a great extent fails to take into account the unique tradition of Turkey’s independent humor magazines. They only cover a certain period of republican history and are based on more visual material than actual sociological analysis. Some academic works of Levent Cantek focus on comic strips and cartoon magazines up until 2000s, including *Çizgili Kenar Notları* (2007) & *Türkiye’de Çizgi Roman*(2012). Ali Şimşek has an insightful study on the new middle class and its cynical humor, based on a case study of *Leman* magazine (Şimşek, 2014).

Despite an increased interest in humor in recent years, it is surprising that so little empirical research has actually been conducted on the topic, especially from the perspectives of the producers of humor. For instance, there is not a single study that analyzes the narrations of humorists creating content in different mediums of humor.

This study is unique in the sense that it rests on an extensive fieldwork, comprising of interviews conducted with Turkey’s leading cartoonists, humor writers, artists, and performers creating in their respective fields since the 1970s onwards up until today. It comprises of the voice of 48 artists, representing three generations of voices from the age of 30 to 74. These

artists work in different mediums, including humor magazines, television, cinema and theatre. Their personal accounts and experiences are utilized to derive clues and insights on what they perceive to be the social function and role of humor in their societies.

While this study is not at all an audience analysis, this methodological strength of interviewing artists reaching wide audiences enabled the study to have a solid understanding on the shifts in popular expectations and tendencies. The interviewed humorists shared real insights on how the content of humor was impacted by the social changes during the period of the research. They understood their audiences enough to be the country's best comedians, writers and cartoonists.

This thesis is a significant contribution to the field of sociology. As humor is a "social transaction" made with an audience in mind, it is produced keeping in mind the dominant cultural assumptions. While humor creators at times aim to suspend, invert, and abandon dominant norms and redefine the social role and function of humor as such, these inversions are nevertheless produced in relation to dominant structures of understanding, cultural orthodoxies and the epistemological order. Only by knowing the social, cultural and linguistic framework, it is possible to understand humorists' narratives on themselves, their work and humor at large in a society existing within a specific framework and reacting to it.

Therefore this study attempted to contribute to the knowledge base by exploring how the social role of humor changes and shifts within the

humorists' narratives, depending on the characteristics of different historical periods. The continuities or discontinuities of various narratives are placed within the sociopolitical context of Turkish society throughout the last 35 years.

Another important contribution of this study to literature is applying ages-old interdisciplinary humor theories, going back to Plato and Kant to the context of Turkish humor. The humor theories are used, whenever appropriate, to interpret and read between the contents and specific details of the collected narratives. They reflect the interdisciplinary nature of the field of humor research.

1.7. THESIS PLAN

The dissertation consists of six chapters. The first three chapters seek to establish the context of the thesis. Introduction chapter aims to clarify the main premise, key concepts, periodization, and arguments of the thesis. It also includes a brief prelude to the main theories used and a section on the promise of the study.

The second chapter is focused on the methodological issues. It starts out with the epistemological background and research paradigms and describes the methodological perspective of the study. Methodology section also clarifies the research questions, data collection process, data analysis and interpretation. After having explained operationalization of key concepts, as well as humor theories, it includes a section on the researcher's role within the study. This chapter describes the methodological perspective of the study

in detail.

The third chapter, Theoretical Framework articulates the theories used in the research in a more detailed manner. It also gives an account of other important theories in the field that are not deemed as applicable to the data emerging from the fieldwork and therefore not used in the thesis. Their inclusion in this chapter aims to give a broader and more comprehensive understanding of the field.

The fourth chapter provides a brief historical background to give the reader an overview of the context in which the narratives are shared. This background dates back to 1980s. The lasting impact of 1980s coup d'état is also mirrored in the narrations of humorists when they reflect on their work and its social role within Turkey. After having covered main characteristics of 1990s and 2000s, the historical background will end with a discussion on Gezi Park protests.

The fifth chapter is the analysis chapter, focusing on the main themes that emerged from the field research, i.e. the narratives of the humorists on the social role and function of humor in Turkey. Chapter 4.1 focuses on humor as a source of opposition, rebellion and freedom of expression. Chapter 4.2 examines the social role of humor as an expression of feelings in a witty manner and a tool for dealing with violent assaults and defending oneself. Chapter 4.3 presents an elaboration of the third theme, i.e. "humor as a source of therapy, hope and survival". Chapter 4.4 illuminates the social role of humor as a tool for increasing social communication & tolerance facilitating the formation of a community. Chapter 4.5 is a wrap-up chapter

on the social role and functions of humor in Turkey in the narratives of the humorists, and aims to demonstrate the connections among the themes.

Finally Chapter 6, as the General Evaluations and Conclusion Chapter presents an outline of the research process and summarizes the findings.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

2.1. EPISTEMOLOGICAL BACKGROUND AND QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PARADIGMS

A qualitative methodology is applied in this study, with an aim to gather an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the participant humorists' narrations on the social role of humor in Turkish society from a historical perspective. An extensive fieldwork is conducted, which enabled the researcher to acquire a cognizance of the main ideals, intentions, experiences, and repression experienced by the representatives of a professional group, i.e. humorists so deeply involved in the politics and social life of the country in the last half century.

Schutt, in *Investigating the Social World*, underlines the following features of qualitative methodology: (1) "A focus on meanings rather than on quantifiable phenomena," (2) "Collection of many data on a few cases rather than few data on many cases," (3) "Study in depth and detail, without predetermined categories or directions, rather than emphasis on analyses

and categories determined in advance," (4) "Conception of the researcher as an 'instrument,' rather than as the designer of objective instruments to measure particular variables," (5) "Sensitivity to context rather than seeking universal generalizations," (6) "Attention to the impact of the researcher's and others' values on the course of the analysis rather than presuming the possibility of value-free inquiry," and (7) "A goal of rich descriptions of the world rather than measurement of specific variables" (Schutt, 2015: 324-325).

Creswell's definition of the basic characteristics of qualitative research (2003: 181) carries similar characteristics. Building on the thoughts of Rossman and Rallis (1998), Creswell identifies the following features, which this study is also based on:

Parallel to the assumptions formulated by Creswell, this qualitative study took place in a natural setting. I, as the researcher, went to the sites, i.e. visited the participants to conduct the interviews at their offices or homes. This enabled me to develop a closer understanding of the participants, based on the level of detail acquired about the individual and the place, being involved in their actual experiences.

This study involved the use of multiple data collection methods that are "interactive and humanistic" (Creswell, 2003: 181). Looking for voluntary involvement of participants in data collection, I aimed to build trust and credibility among the respondents. This facilitated a smooth data collection process, where individuals in the study were gratuitous in sharing information about their experiences, as well as delivering contact

information about other potential participants in the field. The actual methods of data collection expanded beyond interviews and included photographs, e-mails, etc.

As defined by Creswell, qualitative research is ‘emergent, rather than prefigured’. This study very much falls into that category where the initial research questions were refined along the process. As I got more acquainted with the research sites and the participants based on their generation and genres of humor production, I crystallized my research questions. I had the ability to use references and viewpoints from earlier interviews to incite debate in the later interviews. This approach led to the emergence of a general pattern of understanding and development of my research questions into broad themes. The interview questions are attached as an appendix to this study (See Appendix B).

Since qualitative research is essentially interpretive, it requires the researcher to personally filter the data through a personal lens situated in a specific sociopolitical and historical moment. (Creswell, 2003:182). A personal interpretation of the answers led to the formulation of follow-up questions and contributed to enhancing the design of the research. Initiated right before Gezi Park protests, a vast majority of the interviews for this study were conducted after the Gezi Park protests, whose language of rebellion left its mark as being “humorous”. Thus, both the researcher’s and the respondents’ interpretations were influenced by the existing sociopolitical moment in question. (See in more detail in the section on Researcher’s Role).

Based on the definition of a main characteristic of qualitative researcher, i.e. “viewing social phenomena holistically”, this study aimed to cover a broad, almost a panoramic view by bringing together and interpreting a puzzle of a “complex, interactive and encompassing narrative”. (Creswell, 2003:182) While the reasoning in this study is mostly inductive, the thinking process cycled back and forth between the humor theories, data collection and analysis.

The choice of a qualitative methodology utilizing narrative research allowed me to be an active participant in the interviews, shaping and redirecting the questions at the time of the conversation, when necessary. While depending on the already existing theories to formulate most of the interview questions, I had the opportunity to explore the nuances of how humor theories apply to the narrations of humorists in the context of Turkey.

A theoretical framework applicable to Turkey is a fluid combination of the existing schools of thought on humor. This study also comes up with some new and unexpected elements applicable to the context of Turkey. These dynamics will be discussed in detail within the Data Analysis and Findings section.

2.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the following research questions, I prepared the interview questions for each interview, also doing specific research and varying my questions for each participant. My initial main research questions were:

- How do humorists describe the social role of humor in Turkey in their narrations?
- How do the humorists reflect on the impact of sociopolitical context on their humor production and humor's social role in Turkey?

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with three generations of humorists ranging between the ages of 30 to 74. A total of 48 humorists were interviewed between February 2013 and January 2015. Among the respondents are humor writers, cartoonists, actors/actresses of humorous theatre or movies, directors of TV series, radio show hosts and social media content producers. Their common feature is their involvement in the creation, production or execution of humorous content starting from 1970s up until today.

2.3. DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

Qualitative data used in this research have been collected through semi-structured, open-ended, in-depth interviews. All interviews were conducted face-to-face except for a few interviews, where the respondents preferred to send their answers via e-mail. Purposive sampling method is used to find suitable respondents for the study. The respondents' sharing of their social network with the researcher facilitated reaching the humorists included in this study.

Focusing on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest (the common quality being creation, execution or production of humorous works in Turkey), enabled me to answer the research questions determined at the

outset. While the sample studied is not homogenous composed of representatives from a specific genre of humor, I did not consider this to be a weakness, but rather strength. Looking at it from various angles provided me deeper insights into this research question and helped me to identify common themes that are evident across the sample.

Among the 48 respondents were 14 cartoonists, 13 actors and actresses (theatre, film, TV), 7 humor writers, 3 stand-up comedians, 3 radio show hosts, 2 film/TV director, 2 traditional theatre puppeteer (Karagöz), 1 humor festival organizer, 1 cartoon historian, 1 film historian, 1 satirical social media website director (Zaytung). Except for 11 of the interviews, the rest of the respondents reside in Istanbul. 4 of them reside in Ankara and 7 of them reside in İzmir.

My data collection procedures included the following:

- 1- OBSERVATIONS included field notes on the behavior and activities of individuals at the research site. I kept a journal during the research process to reflect on my observations in parallel to analyzing the interviews. I took photographs of participants based on their permissions.
- 2- DOCUMENTS such as books written by the participants, humor magazines, and previous interviews conducted with participants, etc. were used to prepare the researcher's background as well as inform the interview questions.
- 3- AUDIOVISUAL MATERIALS such as photographs, film, theatre, and

other relevant material were used to have an understanding of the humorists' work and style.

- 4- INTERVIEWS constituted the main data source for this thesis. The detailed information about the interview conducting process is explained below:

The average duration for each interview was an hour and a half. Face-to-face interviews were recorded with an audio recorder. The interviews that were sent through e-mail were already in text form. A professional transcribed the recorded interviews. Once the texts of transcribed interviews were received, the main themes that emerged around the questions on the social role of humor were determined. In addition, the data linked to the specific definitions, concepts and ideas outlined in major humor theories were identified. As a researcher, I did not have a preconceived notion of what theories will be used in analyzing the data or what type of themes would emerge before conducting the fieldwork. The field research was conducted with an open mind to permit respondents to answer the questions without any influence.

Interview questions. While keeping in mind the conceptual framework and the main premises established in major humor theories, the questions were carefully framed not to be leading or partial. Questions were broad and general to provide the participants a sense of freedom to construct the meaning of their experiences within the discussions and interactions with the researcher. Based on the assumptions of the social constructivism approach (Creswell, 2003, p.8), the research design included an open-ended

questioning process where the researcher listened carefully to what participants said or did in their life setting.

The researcher was mindful of the fact that the subjective meanings of participants are often negotiated socially and historically and formed through historical and cultural norms that affect their lives. As a result, the heterogeneity of the participants was kept in mind when interpreting the data from the fieldwork. Their specific genres, period of production, as well as the contexts they live and work in were taken into account during data interpretation as far as their impact on the narrative generation.

The data from the fieldwork constituted the most crucial and important element determining the path of analysis. However this does not mean that this study solely reflects the viewpoints of its participants. While the dissertation derives its main direction and pattern from the narrations, as provided in the quotations within the analysis section of the thesis, it also sought to place these narratives in the larger context of social and historical background, when appropriate. The study aimed to decipher how participants were building their narratives based on their subjective conditions, as well as the historical background and the predicates of certain periods of time.

My intent was to make sense of the narrations that humorists build on the social role of humor in Turkey. Rather than starting with a theory, I aimed to inductively develop a pattern of meaning. Categorizing and linking the data to the main concepts and ideas in humor theories made it possible to identify

what humor theories were applicable to the narrations of the humorists from different generations and mediums in Turkey. Interpreting the data from the fieldwork in terms of its connections to the economic, social and cultural background of Turkey when necessary makes this study as a significant contribution to the field of sociology.

2.4. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

I followed the following steps in analyzing and interpreting the data collected from the field (Creswell, 2003: 191):

STEP 1- Organization and preparation of the data for analysis. Once the interviews were conducted, I sent them to a professional to be transcribed. I also typed up my field notes, sorting and arranging data into different types depending on the source of information.

STEP 2- Read through all the data. After I received the texts of transcribed interviews, I read them thoroughly. Parallel to the field notes, the first reading of the interviews were done as a means to get a general sense of the respondents' perceptions, motivations and ideas on the social role and function of humor in Turkish society, as well as the impact of their humor production, as such. This step enabled me to reflect on the overall meaning of respondents' narrations: What general ideas did they articulate? What is the general impression of the overall depth, credibility and use of information? I wrote notes in margins to record my general thoughts about how to interpret the data.

STEP 3-Detailed analysis with coding process: “organizing the material into chunks before bringing meaning into those chunks”(Creswell, 2003: 192). On more detailed readings, the main themes and patterns that emerged in each interview regarding the social role and function of humor were listed as keywords and concepts. These key concepts formed the components of the network of narrations shaping the main arguments and premises of this dissertation. Taking text data into categories and labeling those categories with terms based in the actual language of the participant helped me have a better grasp of my data.

STEP 4- Use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis. Then use the coding to generate a small number of themes or categories. These themes are the ones that appear as major findings and stated under separate headings in the findings section. They display multiple perspectives from individuals and are supported by diverse quotations and specific evidence. I tried to interconnect themes into a storyline (as in narratives). For instance I used Gezi period to set the tone for the second theme of “humor as a witty response”. Combined with multiple perspectives and quotations from individuals, I gave a detailed discussion of how the themes and the relevant subthemes are connected to one another.

2.5. OPERATIONALIZATION OF KEY CONCEPTS

As mentioned in the previous section, reading through the texts of the interviews, I detected the words, phrases and propositions revolving around the question on the “social role of humor”. I pulled out what has been said in

order to describe what “social role and function of humor” meant for the narrators. I also paid attention in my analysis to identify what has been denied/ rejected in the discourses. This analysis aimed at uncovering how humor’s social role was defined in the narrations of the professional group of humorists producing it. It also explored to dig out hints about how the sociopolitical events are reflected on these narrations.

The data analysis based on the interviews conducted over a two-year period of extensive field research required an elaborate thought process. As my intention was to place the narrations of the humorists on the social role of humor within a historical perspective, I analyzed the interviews for main themes that revolved around the social role of humor. In order to do that, I looked for patterns in the interviews by detecting and listing the keywords and concepts. I grouped the concepts and keywords related to each other in clusters and identified their frequencies. Data interpretation from the fieldwork was based on the steps demonstrated in the following matrix:

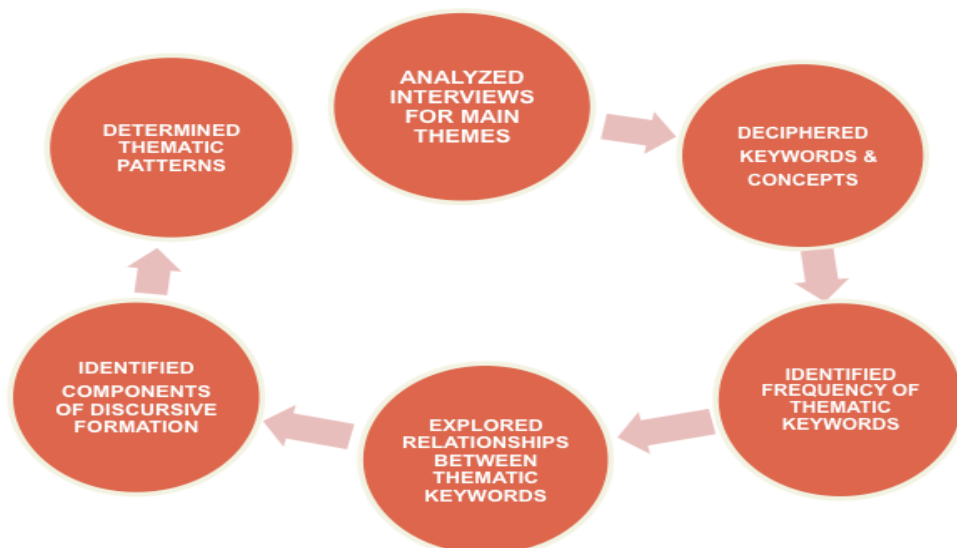


Figure 1. Data Interpretation Matrix

I aimed to establish the correlations amongst the narratives through exploring the relationships between thematic keywords and concepts that emerged during the interviews. For instance, the first and most frequent theme of ‘opposition’ and the discussions that revolved around it had a tendency to include other subthemes and concepts, such as critical humor, freedom of expression, identifying with the underdog, taboos, resistance, fearlessness, common sense, self-censorship, non-dogmatic outlook, and social responsibility. This sorting through the data helped me identify the main patterns and trends the narrations represented.

In my detailed analysis and interpretation of the data gathered during fieldwork, I applied the method of detecting the interrelated keywords and concepts about social role of humor. This content analysis also included areas and topics of discussion beyond the scope of “social role of humor”, yet connected to it and enriched the understanding of the humorists’ perspectives. I also aimed to present discrepant information that ran counter to the main themes that I have identified. I varied the use of long, short and text-embedded quotations, used wording from participants, and intertwined quotations with my interpretations. I compared the narrative outcome and the emerging themes with the existing theories in the field.

Below is the chart that includes the four themes detected during the field research and the subthemes and concepts tackled during the discussions when interviews were conducted.

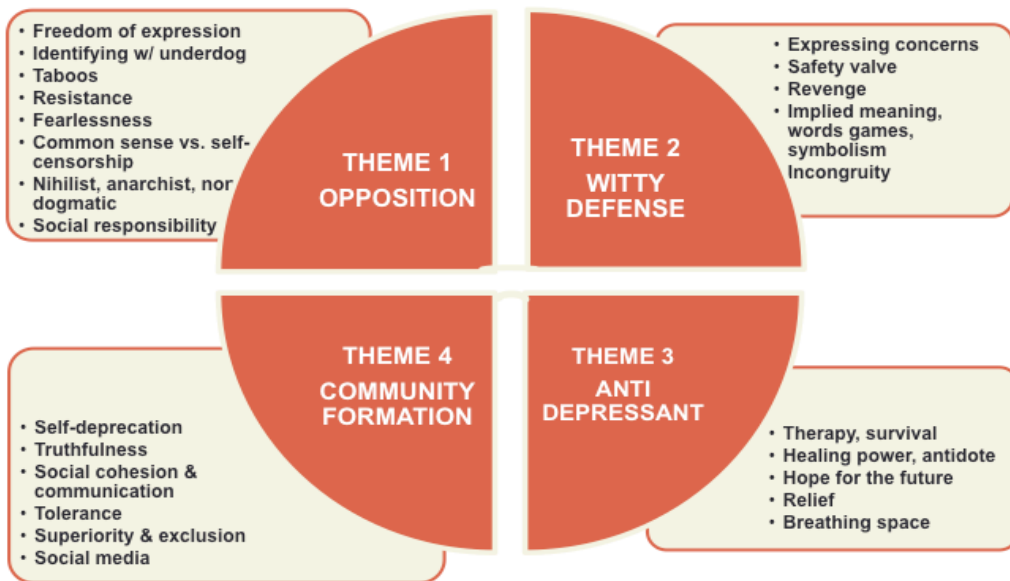


Figure 2. Main Themes Detected in Field Research

In the context of this dissertation, narrative research is used as a tool to elucidate and highlight the utterances that concentrate around certain patterns and themes. Such convergences determined different thematic titles and discussions within the analysis section. This thesis aimed to describe the interplay of relations within the narratives. This connection indicates the relationship between the diverse narrations uttered by the same participant, as well as similar narrations enunciated by various participants and how they coexist and/or differ from one another.

In this context, some of the questions that emerged from a methodological perspective are “what are the specific narratives that appear regarding humor’s social role in a certain time period?”, “how are they connected?” and “how do they differ from one another?” In some sense, the question becomes how the changes in society produce different narratives by the

humorists on the social role of humor.

In the light of these discussions, it is also important to review some of the discussions on authorship and its function both in Foucault's writings as well as Roland Barthes and Walter Benjamin's views on the tension between the agency of the author and the place of his work within society. As this thesis aims to decipher how certain themes appear based on the narratives of "authors" of humorous works, these discussions may shed light on the intricate relationships between the creative status of the author and the complex network of social structures surrounding him.

2.6. OPERATIONALIZATION OF HUMOR THEORIES

In the beginning of the research, a literature review was conducted to determine the potential theories to be applied to the case of social role of humor in Turkey. However, the exact theories to be operationalized were clarified during the course of the research. They were based on the findings of the field research. This study used inductive reasoning, obtaining specific observations of the cartoonists, artists, performers and writers of humorous content through interviews and detecting patterns and regularities in the narratives in order to arrive at broader generalizations and theories. This bottom-up approach "felt" more appropriate in a social science research focusing on humor. It is more open-ended and exploratory, especially at the beginning.

Having interviewed 48 humorists, who have influenced Turkish society over these three decades, this research does not necessarily focus on objective facts

and figures of each historical period, but rather aims to read the social transformation through perceptions of the humorists witnessing and creating in those respective time periods. Seeing through their eyes and peeking into their subjective worlds adds an extraordinary intimacy to this study in sociology.

The first set of questions aimed to explore how the humorists perceived the social role of humor in Turkish society. The second set of questions focused on the shifts and changes in the boundaries of expression through humor during the period of their involvement in the field. By this way, the social, political and economic transformations were unearthed in the narrations of the humorists.

To elaborate further on this issue, the factors influencing a perceived change/shift of taboos in this period were also asked to the respondents. These questions focused on the issues and representations that cannot be expressed in different periods of focus in the study and how they evolved in time, if they did. The questions were not framed in abstract categories, but rather aimed to open a space for the respondent to give concrete examples from his time and work. During the research, some questions targeted issues and topics that could be expressed only through humor and not by other means of communication.

As mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, the four main themes on the social role of humor that surfaced in the analysis of data corresponded to some of the major humor theories, which will be explained in further detail in the Theoretical Framework chapter. One of these theories is incongruity

theory that will be operationalized in this thesis to mean humorous works that function subversively in order to distort the already existing, culturally defined sense of reality. This theory was mainly used to explain the theme *"expression of feelings and thoughts in a witty manner."*

After a few interviews, it was clear that most respondents made a distinction between "common sense" and "politically induced self-censorship". The interview questions were posed to gain an understanding of what constituted common sense vs. self-censorship in the eyes of creators of humor. Most of the respondents approve observing the unwritten requirements of what common sense dictates, which some of them express as "abstaining from breaking hearts" by making jokes on society's sensitivities. Consulting "one's conscience and common sense" when making a joke is praised.

On the other hand, most of the respondents in principle radically oppose any political restraints on humor causing self-censorship, which has its roots in a fear of being reprimanded with monetary fines and/or court cases by political authorities. This tendency in the narratives is also verified by the fact that majority of humorists interviewed regard the social role of humor as being *"a source of opposition, rebellion and freedom of expression"*.

The superiority theory is also applied to the narratives on the social role of humor, based on the accounts of the respondents. As stated in its most crisp form by T. Hobbes, superiority humor requires the audience to feel a "sudden glory over recognition of their supremacy over others". This theory

especially applies to the cases where humor serves to create a sense of superiority (especially deriving from a conviction that the humorist is smarter than the target of the joke). For instance, some cartoonists define their work as “zakat of intelligence”, at times serving to take “revenge” from the authorities for their misdeeds. Superiority humor is often applied to many cases, such as raw sexist or racist jokes, however, the most common reference made to this type of humor during this research coincided with *“expression of feelings and thoughts in a witty manner”, as well as “creating a community among humorists and their audience based on a shared sense of intellectual and cultural superiority.”*

As mentioned before, this study is not focused on studying and evaluating the perceptions and the reactions of the audience. However, based on the questions that seek to understand the artists’ interpretation of the “function and purpose of humor for the society they live in”, it was clear that feeling of superiority was one of the major motives also for the spectators. The definition of spectators of cabaret by Metin Akpınar; “If the person on stage is a hero, that’s me. If he is a dumb guy, he is the other” indicates this “feeling immune” from being a target of the joke and feeling of superiority.

Finally, Freud’s relief theory is used in this research to explain some of the narratives focusing on the social role of *humor as an anti-depressant and therapy mechanism* in Turkish society. As mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, humor serving the purpose of “taking off the steam” most often occurs in the case of Turkey to deal with the hardship, inequalities, violence, desperation and social injustices. Therefore, while the core premise of relief theory is

applicable in the case of Turkey, the context shifts from more psychological, personal level to the social level. In this way, statements on humor serving this role are also related with other themes, such as humor giving strength and hope and making it easier to continue with one's life.

While narrative research provided the means to make a puzzle out of this network of discourses, the humor theories were instrumental in providing a context for the narrative formations around the "social role of humor". The explanations within the humor theories shed light on how to interpret the contents of the narratives. Raising a question such as the "social role/function of humor" required digging deeper into more interdisciplinary field of humor studies to contextualize the findings of this research mainly relying on fieldwork.

2.7. RESEARCHER'S ROLE

As outlined by Schutt in the beginning of this chapter, qualitative methodology is based on the "conception of the researcher as an 'instrument,' rather than as the designer of objective instruments to measure particular variables". This requires paying "attention to the impact of the researcher's and others' values on the course of the analysis" (Schutt, 2015). Similarly, Denzin and Lincoln point out the critical role of the researcher in qualitative studies, as the data collection includes the mediation of a human instrument, rather than inventories or questionnaires (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Therefore any biases, assumptions, expectations or experiences of the researcher to qualify his/her ability to conduct the research and influence the data collection process need to be identified at the outset as well as during

the research process (Greenbank, 2003).

As a sociologist born in late 1970s and being raised watching Devekuşu Kabare plays on Beta videotapes and witnessing my parents read Gırgır magazine over the weekends have inevitably shaped my sense of humor and understanding of Turkish politics and society. Coming from a middle class family with civil servant parents, I have been raised with values of honesty, integrity and a social democratic and left-leaning political affiliation.

I built on this background by living in the United States between 2004 and 2007, studying international relations, economics and also working at the World Bank. When I returned to Turkey I saw my society with fresh eyes and how many people around me (mostly well-educated, with good jobs on paper) were unhappy. They accepted the status quo as the natural order of things. Even if they questioned, it was often to complain but not necessarily to make a change. They endured their jobs and waited for the weekends.

This fascinated me so much in 2008 that I decided to pursue a PhD in sociology at METU. I was interested in the tension between structure and agency, in other words how individuals respond with creativity and imagination when the structure suffocates and inhibits them. Having been closely exposed to the subversive and dynamic tradition of humor in Turkey since my childhood, I decided to focus on humorists as a professional group in my PhD thesis. Humorists are a fascinating, bold group of people trying to stretch boundaries of free expression in our society, and struggling with issues of imagination and creativity.

Conducting research on such a personal, yet social topic, such as humor, I inescapably reflected some of my personal views and biases on politics, society, art and ethics. In this context, I was actually biased towards humorists, yet biased against repressive political system, society and its representatives. When I was choosing the research sites, participants, preparing my initial questions, as well as asking probing questions, my personal background, knowledge base, political affiliations and to a lesser extent biases had an impact.

I aimed to be as inclusive and broad as possible in reaching out to the participants included in this study. However, there were limitations. The majority of participants are left-leaning humorists, critical of the system. This heavy concentration is due to the fact that it is generally recognized that there is more "published" and/or produced left wing humor in Turkey. I made efforts to contact conservative, pro-government, Çarşaf humor magazine cartoonists. Nevertheless, they weren't interested in participating.

I also attempted to contact the country's most popular comedians, including Şener Şen, Recep İvedik, Cem Yılmaz and Demet Akbaş. While some were initially interested in my research, none of them ever participated in an official interview. At some point, I had to give up. It became clear to me that I was using too much resources and time to reach these most famous individuals. As predictable, I found during my research that as the level of popularity increases, the probability of responding to a request for interview decreases among the humorists. This applies more to humorists working on

stage, including comedy actors and actresses.

The participant group that was most responsive was the cartoonists, who were quite open and elaborate about sharing information on research questions, as well as other humorists' contact information. After interviewing Bahadır Baruter, I remember him praising me gratefully as a sociologist finally contacting him for an academic study on humor, especially after the Gezi Park protests. The humorists are generally approached by media representatives for commenting or promoting their recent work. However, I got the impression that it is rare, if not non-existent, that they are approached by a social scientist for comprehensive research purposes.

The timing of the interviews was critical and deserves to be mentioned in this context. This PhD research topic was determined six months before Gezi Park protests. Gezi Park protests became a defining event in the sociopolitical history of Turkey, with humor playing a significant role within the accompanying debates on freedom of expression and democracy. The timing of the research inevitably influenced the interviews and participants' views on the social role of humor in society, as well as their motivations and experiences in humor production, per se. It also had an impact on me, as a researcher and an active participant in the protests at the time.

Only two of the interviews conducted in Ankara (Gizem Aldemir and Modern Sabahlar) took place before Gezi Park protests. Interestingly enough, Modern Sabahlar crew wanted to renew the interview and we gathered for a 'fresh' interview in January 2015 to reflect their post-Gezi views. Ege

Kayacan, in his e-mail explicitly defined the pre-Gezi Park period as “a time when one could pretend as if Turkey was normal”. Therefore, in their words: “what they have expressed before Gezi Park protests have become obsolete.” On the other hand, there were other humorists, such as Met-Üst, who was tired of being asked questions on Gezi and refused to answer a question regarding humor magazines’ role on the way leading up to the protests.

Strength of this study is that almost all of the interviews were conducted face to face, which allowed the researcher to pose follow-up questions to clarify points made, and observe the body language and intonation of the respondents. It also gave the opportunity to present the research topic and objectives, gain confidence of the respondents and as a result be connected to other performers engaged in humor production. Being part of the social network of the humorists provided tremendous opportunities and insights to a fascinating field of art, culture and creation.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Regardless of time, age and place, philosophers have always interpreted humor in radically different ways. While some argue that laughter is inherently rebellious, democratic and progressive, others claim that it is culturally restrictive and reaffirms status quo. Famous French philosopher H. Bergson (1900) argued that laughter serves as a disciplinary force since we laugh at the rigid individuals who cannot adapt, as society requires. On the other hand, Russian philosopher, literary critic, and semiotician M. Bakhtin claimed that we are most free when we laugh (2001); as it is the only time we question and reverse the taken-for-grantedness of the world we live in.

This dual nature of humor as well as its fluidity makes it both a difficult and an intriguing topic of study. While philosophizing comedy might seem like a futile effort to some, Slovenian psychoanalyst A. Zupancic argues that there is so much comedy in philosophy that you can't help but converge the two (Zupancic, 2011). Comedy and philosophy resemble each other tremendously as they both resist serving a direct purpose. Resisting a direct purpose does not necessarily mean lacking a purpose though. This thesis will aim to uncover what humor represents and what social role it serves according to the producers of humorous works in Turkey since the 1970s.

The theories on humor originate from various academic disciplines such as psychology, linguistics, communications, and cultural studies, etc. While this PhD dissertation in Sociology is inspired and informed by academic theories from such disciplines, it limits itself theoretically on a few select theories. It will also be complemented by theories on superiority, incongruity and relief to explain the different periods in question, when appropriate.

3.1. SUPERIORITY THEORY: RIDICULE AS AN EGO BOOSTER

Philosophers in ancient Greece, such as Plato and Aristotle, struggled to understand the nature of human beings and their interactions within the social and political environment. Without any real intention, they became the masterminds of the first well-known theory of humor, *superiority theory*. Their views on the emotions behind humor influenced later thinkers such as 17th century British philosopher, Thomas Hobbes to develop this theory further.

The seeds of superiority theory were manifest in “The Republic” dated B.C. 380, including Plato’s dialogues with Socrates. Expressing his views on the ideal state in *The Republic* through the words of Socrates, Plato argued that laughter could be used to bring order. Naturally, a phenomenon aimed at bringing order should not be used against authority. Socrates also expressed his suspicion of laughter in the Platonic dialogue *Philebus*. He argued that we actually laugh at people’s misperceptions about themselves. We laugh at people who think they are richer, smarter, and more beautiful, than they really are. Socrates detected a certain amount of malice in laughter and

questioned the intentions and morality behind it (Billig, 2005).

They idealized a hierarchical community ruled by philosopher-princes who were serious human beings. Main principle for these philosophers was self-control; which meant curbing “the pleasures of eating, drinking and sex”. Plato warned against heavy laughter, where one loses rational control of oneself, and in doing so, becomes for a time less than fully human (Morreal, 1987). Socrates and Plato did not approve of carnivalesque humor, which will be explained in an upcoming section. In their mind, it permitted a disruption of hierarchy and caused a mockery of higher philosophical notions of truth and beauty, which was not acceptable (Billig, 2005).

This focus on maintaining the order and hierarchy is actually reversed in the case of Turkey, where superiority humor that came out in the narratives often times emphasized the superiority of the ruled against the rulers in terms of their intelligence and wit. Humorists’ narratives on the surface mainly concentrated on how humor is being used against authority. This tendency has actually emerged as the main theme during the fieldwork. Laughter is far from bringing order in these cases; the only means by which it enhances social control is by providing a temporary “feeling good” for its producers and audience.

Aristoteles, the student of Plato and another philosopher who elaborated on comedy and tragedy said, “A baby is not a human until 40-days-old when he/she starts laughing” (Stott, 2005). While laughter is a trait that solely belongs to human beings, Aristo did not define it as a desirable quality. In

Poetics he argued that tragedy deals with subjects who are average or better than average, while in comedy we look down upon the characters, who are of lesser virtue than the audience (Aristotle, 1996:9). As the audience feels superior by ridiculing these “comic” types, comedy strokes their ego and sense of self-importance (Billig, 2005: 43).

Being inspired by these ancient Greek philosophers, Thomas Hobbes deepened the analysis of humor and actually turned it into a humor theory. Living in violent times, around the outbreak of English Civil War and faced with the threat of being named as a heretic by Puritan revolutionaries, Hobbes’s view on human nature was not too optimistic. In his grand work, *Leviathan* published in 1651, he made his point clear that human beings are selfish creatures, whose instincts need to be curbed by external control mechanisms and moral rules. His ideas on humor resemble this cruel vision of the world and his belief in the egocentric nature of man.

He argued that humor arises from a “sudden glory” felt when we recognize our supremacy over others. Therefore, laughter is not the sign of a harmonious, happy society. On the contrary, it would be a place of mockery where people’s competitive natures lead them to make fun of each other. He wrote in *Leviathan*: “...the passion of laughter is nothing else but sudden glory arising from sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly...” (Parti, Ch. 6)

3.2. INCONGRUITY THEORY: DECONSTRUCTING THE TAKEN-FOR-GRANTED

Incongruity theory arose as a response to Hobbes's "suspicious" views on laughter, outlined in the previous section. An English philosopher and one of the most influential of Enlightenment thinkers, Locke trusted human beings to be rational. He also believed in equality. His theory of knowledge rested on the assumption that we acquire knowledge through perceptions, thus a king and a common man do not have any innate differences from birth. This revolutionary spirit saw Locke serve as the philosophical architect of the Glorious Revolution, or coup d'état of 1688, that ousted the Catholic despot King James II.

Locke's ideas were the catalyst for modern humor theories. The 18th century Britain of his times is regarded as a golden age for humor. Wealth, arising from increased world trade and colonization, as well as the import of new goods, such as coffee and chocolate, made social life fertile and lively. A certain type of gentlemanly intellectual emerged in these newly established coffee houses. Discussing the latest art, literature and politics, they also debated the nuances between good humor and wit vs. coarse laughter.

Locke's incongruity theory is simple; laughter arises from an intellectual mismatch. Humor is a result of wit and quickness of the mind, not a hidden agenda of egotistic ridicule as argued by Hobbes. Locke differentiated between wit and humor; focusing on the cognitive processes, rather than emotional dynamics behind laughter. When your expectations conflict with reality, you laugh at the world.

Immanuel Kant, a prominent representative of the incongruity theory of humor, argues that we laugh when an unexpected, absurd situation occurs.

In everything that is to excite a lively convulsive laugh there must be something absurd (in which the understanding, therefore, can find no satisfaction). Laughter is an affectation arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing. This transformation, which is certainly not enjoyable to the understanding, yet indirectly gives it very active enjoyment for a moment. Therefore its cause must consist in the influence of the representation upon the body, and the reflex effect of this upon the mind (Kant, 2005:133)

Kant compares humor to music, because a joke is as 'pleasant' as music in shifting the mind elsewhere without much thought. They both afford lively gratification. In both music and humor, we enjoy the bodily changes caused by rapidly shifting ideas. He argues that the main reason behind laughter is the raising expectations suddenly disappearing into nothing.

While Kant focused on the gap between expectation and experience, German philosopher, A. Schopenhauer emphasized the gap between sense perceptions and abstract rational knowledge. His landmark book on European philosophy, *The World as Will and Idea*, had a brief section on humor. He argued that "the cause of laughter in every case is simply the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been thought through it in some relation, and laughter itself is just the expression of this incongruity" (Morreal, 1987).

To give an example, Schopenhauer mentions the prison guards who allowed a criminal to play cards with them. Then they catch him cheating and they kick him out. Schopenhauer comments, "They let themselves be led by the general conception, 'Bad companions are turned out,' and forget that he is also a prisoner, i. e., one whom they ought to hold fast" (Schopenhauer, Supplement to Book I: Ch. 8).

He expands on Aristotle's definition of the comic in Chapter 5 of *The Poetics*: "The ridiculous is a mistake or unseemliness that is not painful or destructive." He argues that; "The tragic and the comic are the same, in so far as both are based on contradiction; but the tragic is the suffering contradiction, the comical, the painless contradiction. The comic apprehension evokes the contradiction or makes it manifest by having in mind the way out, which is why the contradiction is painless. The tragic apprehension sees the contradiction and despairs of a way out" (Aristotle, 1996).

The reason behind the pleasure in laughter is the fact that our sense of perception overcomes the conscious thought processes. While perception is the original knowledge, thinking is often the vehicle of fear and repentance. It is the defeat of this dictating force in our lives that gives us joy and brings out the laughter.

In every suddenly appearing conflict between what is perceived and what is thought, what is perceived is always unquestionably right; for it is not subject to error at all, requires no confirmation from without, but answers for itself. ... The victory of knowledge of perception over thought affords us pleasure. For perception is the original kind of

knowledge inseparable from animal nature, in which everything that gives direct satisfaction to the will presents itself. It is the medium of the present, of enjoyment and gaiety; moreover it is attended with no exertion. With thinking the opposite is the case: it is the second power of knowledge, the exercise of which always demands some, and generally considerable exertion. Besides, it is the conceptions of thought that often oppose the gratification of our immediate desires, for, as the medium of the past, the future, and of seriousness, they are the vehicles of our fears, our repentance, and all our cares. It must therefore be diverting to us to see this strict, untiring, troublesome governess, the reason, for once convicted of insufficiency. On this account then the mien or appearance of laughter is very closely related to that of joy. (Supplement to Book I, Ch. 8)

Another philosopher theorizing on humor, Danish philosopher and theologian Søren Kierkegaard viewed humor as a consequence of incongruity, but instead called it a contradiction. He argued that the comical is present in every stage of life, for wherever there is life, there is contradiction, and wherever there is contradiction, the comical is present. In his discussion of the “three spheres of existence” (the three existential stages of life—the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious), he discusses humor and its close relative, irony. Irony marks the boundary between the aesthetic and the ethical spheres, while humor marks the boundary between the ethical and religious spheres. Kierkegaard said, “humor is the last stage of existential awareness before faith”. Therefore, a religious person is likely to cultivate humor (Morreal, 2009).

In this context, it is important to note a very parallel insight that was enunciated within the course of this research by Onur Ünlü. Being a 42-year-old cinema and television writer and producer, Ünlü also directed Leyla

ile Mecnun, one of the most popular comedy TV series between 2011-2013.

He said:

Humor and irony has a strong connection to truth. Truth brings a kind of smile to your face. I also think it creates a feeling of alienation. If you experience enlightenment on a certain matter, you feel alienated from the situation you are in and that brings about laughter. Once you become aware of it and learn how to use that door of perception, you may be closer to truth and thus humor.

3.3. RELIEF THEORY: TENSIONS BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY

Every theory of laughter is a reflection of the time period and its philosophical imprint, as expressed by the French philosopher, Ludovic Dugas in 1902. A social theory, and in our case a humor theory, is a reflection of the zeitgeist, the spirit and dominant school of thought that influences a certain period in time. In Hegel's words in Lectures on the Philosophy of History: "no man can surpass his own time, for the spirit of his time is also his own spirit" (Magee, 2011)

The ideas, vocabulary and the style of expression within a certain theory reflect the joys, fears, wisdom, life styles, etc. of the period it emerges from. For instance, 18th century philosophers, when the incongruity theory came about, produced light, slim, leather-bound treatises to bring with them to coffee houses to read over a drink and chat. However, Bain and Spencer, who were the pioneers of Relief Theory produces volumes of material that one can only sit down and read at a desk (Billig, 2005).

Gazing at the intellectual history behind the emergence of Relief Theory, one comes across Darwinism and materialist philosophy of the 19th century. Bain and Spencer came from working class backgrounds and advocated for science against traditional conservatism. Rather than rank, aristocracy and religious orthodoxy, they valued hard work, achievement and discovery. They argued that the Victorian principles of hard work, constraint and self-discipline were going against our innate child-like freedom (Billig, 2005).

According to Scottish philosopher and educationalist Alexander Bain, release from constraint produces pleasure and an increase of nervous energy that can result in laughter. He actually connected this state with degradation. As constraint signifies a state of being solemn and serious, the momentary release from this condition creates a free energy in our body. He likens it to schoolchildren freed from the constraint of class, rushing through school gates with joy and laughter. Laughter represented a rebellion against the serious demands of the social order (Billig, 2005).

Sigmund Freud, on the other hand, is the most well-known philosopher contributing to the relief theory of humor. In his book, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), he argues that human condition rests upon self-deception. The secrets we even hide from ourselves come out in the form of jokes. The comic is an “unmasking”, a mechanism that allows, whether we watch or play it, a free discharge of impulses we daily have to repress. For him, a joke was inherently social; it actually is “the most social of all the mental functions that aim at a yield of pleasure” (Freud, 2002: 238)

Similar to Hobbes, Freud points to a conflict between individual desires and social order. Human instincts such as sexuality and aggression go against social rules and they are disciplined from an early age. Repression comes as a disciplinary force, exerting control over and transforming the infant into a “civilized being”. However, it is almost impossible to get rid of all the infantile energy. The residual energy manifests itself through temptations to escape into pleasure. He goes on to answer how these temptations manifest themselves in his work.

Freud focuses on the techniques, tendencies, motifs, joy mechanisms and social relationships behind jokes. In one section, he compares jokes to dreams. Processes that lead to a formulation of a joke, such as intensification, representation with meaningless or opposite images, double meanings, indirect representation, etc. are very similar to the processes of dream formation (Freud, 2002: 191) As he defines dreams as “wish-fulfillments”, there are really no innocent dreams. They all reflect the hidden subconscious fears, desires and hopes. The unconscious id tries to take control of the ego in dreams when consciousness is off-guard. Similar to dreams, slip of tongue is interpreted by Freud to be a way of a secret thought or emotion coming out.

Jokes and humor are significant mediums of these pleasurable escapes, rebelling against the disciplinary tendencies of society. The jokes tend to cluster around sensitive topics, social prohibitions and taboos. In controversial, tendentious jokes, there is the air of a mini festival breaking social conventions, lifting customary restrictions temporarily as Freud depicts in Totem and Tabu. (Billig, 2005: 155)

Billig argues that Freud did not develop in detail his thesis on how society imposes this disciplinary control on the individuals. Even though it starts out as a promising sociological theory of humor, this is where it falls short of a thorough social analysis of jokes. Being the pioneer of psychoanalysis, he explains the psychological motives of the individual child using theories, such as Oedipus complex (Billig, 2005: 144-147).

In this context, the instances within this thesis where the relief theory of Freud will come to the fore will generally revolve around cases where the social taboos and inhibitions find a voice and outlet through humor. Different than the Freudian “slip of the tongue” reflecting the hidden subconscious fears, desires and hopes, the narratives emphasizing the relief function of humor focused on a more social kind of relief- a break from social constraints and taboos, a relief that someone voiced a political concern, injustice or absurdity.

According to Michael Billig, a Professor of Social Sciences working in contemporary social psychology and who has written an extensive book on humor theory, Freud had three important observations. One is that tendentious jokes produce more laughter than innocent ones. As both types of jokes employ the same techniques, it is not the form but the content of the joke that attracts laughter. This explains the popularity of dirty and aggressive jokes.

The second point, also proved by later psychological studies, is that enjoyment of a joke depends on the target and the audience. In these studies,

jokes where a superior mocks a subordinate or vice versa are presented to participants. The audience in superior positions enjoyed jokes targeting the subordinates, whereas those who occupied subordinate positions preferred jokes that mocked superiors.

The third observation of Freud is that we delude ourselves thinking that we laugh at how smart the jokes are structured whereas we in fact laugh at the tendentious thought behind the joke. We don't like to confront this thought as it brings a painful self-awareness that we are actually taking delight in cruelty or obscenity.

Freud did not applaud humor for being smart and witty, but tried to uncover the hidden motives behind why we laugh at certain jokes and not others. However, this critical approach to humor did not prevent him from placing humor on the side of rebellious naughtiness. It challenges authority, defends the powerless, teases the society's straightjacket. While rebellious, it is also accommodating, as it is not a serious challenge to power (Billig, 2005: 168). This approach is certainly disputed by his contemporary Henri Bergson, who regarded humor as an important tool utilized by society to tame its individuals and attain social discipline.

3.4. BERGSON AND THE SOCIAL FUNCTION OF HUMOR

Henri Bergson, an early 20th century French philosopher who also wrote on humor, ended up developing the most well-known and first real social theory of laughter. His book *Laughter* (1900) is one of the most influential books on humor theory, similar to *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*

(1905) of his contemporary, Freud. In his young years, Bergson was attracted to Herbert Spencer's philosophy, however soon become critical of the materialism of Spencer, who placed the spiritual world beyond scientific knowledge (Billig, 2005: 112). The spirit of the time was also reactionary against the rigid materialism of nineteenth century. Bergson developed a philosophy of intuition over his lifetime. Laughter and humor was a vital aspect of it.

He defined life as a "vital impulse", which cannot be understood by reason alone. This spiritual force constantly tries to overcome the material limitations. This conflict lies at the heart of evolution of the organized world. He was reacting against the mechanical logic of the 19th century asserting that real meanings of experience can be found in intuitions. There is a spontaneous, changing, vital response to every situation. Our deepest personal experiences are beyond the grasp of pure reason. Based on these views, his analysis of humor rests on three basic premises:

The first premise is that laughter is human, we only laugh at humans, or the qualities that resemble humans in animals or objects:

You may laugh at an animal, but only because you have detected in it some human attitude or expression. You may laugh at a hat, but what you are making fun of, in this case, is not the piece of felt or straw, but the shape that men have given it- the human caprice whose mold it has assumed. Several philosophers have defined man as "an animal, which laughs". They might equally well have defined him as an animal, which is laughed at; for if any other animal, or some lifeless object, produces the same effect, it is always because of some resemblance to man, of the stamp he gives it or the use he puts it to.

(Bergson, 1900)

The second observation is that ‘an absence of feeling’ accompanies laughter. In Bergson’s words, “indifference is its natural environment, for laughter has no greater foe than emotion.” He adds, “We put our affection to court and impose silence upon our pity.” Perhaps his most remarkable phrase is that ‘comic demands something like a momentary anesthesia of the heart’ (Bergson, 1900). We free ourselves from the pressures of social empathy; we can be cruel against the target of our joke.

The third point Bergson argues is the need of laughter to be social: “laughter appears to stand in need of an echo.” He moves from psychology to sociology. As Billig suggests, “it is as if we cannot be trusted to examine the anesthesia of our own hearts” (Billig, 2005: 122). Thus, contextualizing laughter within society required asking a different question. In contrast to previous philosophers who asked, “why do human beings laugh?” he asked, “What are the social effects of laughter?” While being negative and cruel at its core, humour performed some useful functions according to Bergson.

Society aims to avoid and tame “inelasticity of character, of mind and even of body.” This rigidity is not functional in the eyes of the society. Therefore, laughter performs a disciplinary function to discourage inelasticity. “Rigidity is the comic, and laughter is its corrective.” Therefore, in his argument, laughter emerges due to a rigid or mechanical behavior. Incongruity theory fails to explain what specific type of incongruity causes laughter but according to Bergson, a human acting inelastic like a ‘thing’ or ‘object’ causes us to laugh. People do not like to be laughed at, as they feel humiliated. That

precisely is the function of laughter. Therefore laughter cannot be kind-hearted (Bergson, 1900: 21). But at the same time, spirit through laughter prevents human from being just a mechanical body.

Bergson's work cannot be analyzed without reference to Marx's concept of alienation, as both approaches reflect on the case of human beings lose their essence, and become a part of the machine. This rigid and mechanical behavior, which comes about as a result of division of labor, creates the modern comic type identified by his professional cruelty, inelasticity and incapability of authentic personality. A comic situation occurs when a human being ceases to behave like a human being, but rather like a clock, which functions automatically. Our laughter actually reflects a part of ourselves that is not machine-like, that is human (Sypher, 1980: ix).

There is a tension in Bergson's theory that laughter both performs a disciplinary role and can be used in the service of elasticity. Serving a disciplinary function often implies being conservative, on the side of conformity and status quo. Elasticity, on the other hand, implies a free spirit and imagination. Billig argues that humor, as rhetoric, can be at the service of different political factions; it can be utilized by conservatism as well as radicalism.

Bergson asserts that comedy fails to go much deeper in its analysis of humans. "Its gaiety happens like froth along a beach" as it looks at the man only from outside. He also argues that it is always easier to laugh at the *unsociable* rather than *immoral*. This taint towards the disciplinary function of

humor brings him to say that the comic is ‘so frequently dependent on the manners or ideas, or to put it bluntly, on the prejudices of society.’ The laughter thus serves to encourage a certain social flexibility, but mainly to ensure that people follow certain customs and routines and don’t step out of the line (Billig, 2005: 131).

During the course of the research, the respondents did not enunciate statements that resembled a Bergsonian understanding of the social function of humor. Attributing a disciplinary function to an almost romantically “rebellious” concept like humor has probably appeared out of place for the creators of humorous works. While this function was not openly expressed in these subjective accounts, the instances within the narratives where this tendency is detected will be outlined in the analysis/findings sections.

3.5. MIKHAIL BAKHTIN: THE CARNIVAL

François Rabelais, at the beginning of his satirical novel on the tale of father & son giants- Gargantua and Pantagruel- extended an invitation of laughter:

Seeing how sorrow eats you, defeats you.
I'd rather write about laughing than crying,
For laughter makes men human and courageous.

In a period of religious oppression, Rabelais’s work was regarded as a breath of fresh air. Bakhtin, a Russian philosopher and literary critic, analyzed his work in his book, *Rabelais and His World*. Bakhtin’s conceptualization of “the carnival” in Rabelais’s work and the Middle Ages refers to a privileged place where the normal hierarchy is suspended and reversed. It is associated with collectivity felt through a unique sense of time and space. Through costume

and mask, an individual has the opportunity to change bodies and thus renewed. Carnival also creates an increased awareness of one's sensual, material, bodily unity and community (Clark & Holquist, 1986: 302).

All were considered equal during carnival. Here, in the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age (Bakhtin, 1984: 10).

In ancient European cultures, before the development of social class, festive rituals were an irrevocable aspect of the unified cultural life of people. Comedy first came about in festivals like, Dionysia festival in Ancient Greece celebrating spring and fertility. As class and state developed, the comic/festive elements of culture were excluded from the official culture and became the alternative folk culture of carnival (Bakhtin, 1984: 4).

Carnival being a culture of comedy, festival and the marketplace, opposed the official serious culture of the church and feudal court with a culture of feasts, fairs, pageants, clowns, fools, jugglers, profanity, laughter and parody. Hierarchies are suspended and even demolished in this second world. Everybody is free to eat, make love, and have fun. The concepts of powerful vs. weak, people vs. aristocracy are meaningless. This life exists outside the realm of official life. It is a different way of living, a realm of community, freedom, equality and abundance.

Laughter, which is at the core of the carnival, never underwent sublimation of religious or philosophical kind according to Bakhtin. Laughter remained outside official falsifications that are coated with a layer of pathetic

seriousness. Even in literature, the comic genres were the freest and the least regimented. All high and serious genres and high forms of language and style were drenched in conventionality, hypocrisy and falsification. Laughter alone remained uninfected by lies. There are various indirect linguistic expressions of laughter, such as irony, parody, humor, joke, etc. (Bakhtin, 1984: 237).

In Bakhtin's analysis of Rabelasian chronotype, laughter in a pre-class, collective, work-oriented agricultural time is explored. This productive and generative time is measured by events of collective life, as opposed to being isolated by events of individual life. It is related to *productive growth*. There is a cycle of life and death, where the ripening, perishing and death are seen in the context of growing and multiplying mass of new lives. This time is *spatial and concrete*- it is not separated from the earth and nature. There is a unity to life for Rabelais, who does not distinguish between individual evolution and historical growth and cultural progress. In a Rabelais novel, we are not shown what a character is thinking, experiencing, i.e. his internal dialogue, because life has absolutely no individual aspect.

Bakhtin also makes use of the unofficial side of speech, including curses. In his world, there is no sense of inferiority and there is nothing that cannot be outwardly expressed. All historical limits are destroyed and swept away by laughter. Representatives of the old world, including monks, religious fanatics, etc. are treated as absurd and doomed. The field remains open to a free unfolding of all possibilities inherent in man. His major heroes are models for unlimited human potential, such as the humanist-king who has

absolute freedom of will and creativity.

Charlie Chaplin's famous movie, *Dictator*, which parodies Hitler working on the fine line between tyrant and clown, is an example of Bakhtin style carnivalesque laughter (Sanders, 2001: 303). This comical ambivalence is displayed in the character of Hynkel, who sways between evil and foolishness. The duality and carnivalesque inversion goes so far at the end to replace a persecuted Jewish hairdresser with the dictator and have him deliver his own speech of a utopian vision for mankind instead of a hateful racist rant (Robb: 2006, 97).

3.6. DISCUSSIONS IN LITERATURE ON AUTHOR FUNCTION

In his 1969 essay, "What is an Author?" Foucault developed the idea of "author function" to explain the author as a classifying principle within a particular discursive formation. He begins and ends his essay with a theme borrowed from Beckett: "What does it matter who is speaking?" and unearths what this "indifference" really means by locating the author and his work within a greater mode of existence in a culture.

While in the age of Greek epic or Arabian narratives, writing was a means to "elude death"; today's idea of the narrative has given the work the right to kill the author, erasing the signs of his particular individuality (Foucault, 1969).² However, solely focusing on the notion of "work", analyzing its internal relations, structures and architecture is not sufficient according to Foucault. Besides the difficulties of defining what constitutes work and "its

² Michel Foucault. "What Is an Author?" *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory*. Ed. Vassilis Lambropoulos and David Neal Miller. Albany: State University Press of New York, 1987. 124-42.

unity” per se, this type of analysis is incomplete without imagining the general condition of each text, “the condition of both the space in which it is dispersed and the time in which it unfolds”.

Based on his constant interest in the discursive elements that comprise a given society, Foucault defines the author as performing a certain role with regard to narrative discourse. He is not simply an element in a discourse. The author’s name manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and its status. In other words, the function of an author is to characterize the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society.

Foucault does not give much credit to critics, who discern a “deep” motive, and a “creative” power in the individual projected on him for being an author. He rather sees the author-function varying according to periods, types of discourse, in other words, the convergence of a complex web of discursive practices. As these practices change or disappear and as new practices appear, the author-function will necessarily reflect those changes. He extends a call to study discourses not only in their expressive values, but also according to their modes of existence and how their “modes of circulation, valorization, attribution, and appropriation of discourses” differentiate in each culture.

He argues that the author function is instrumental in demonstrating the social relationships at the time, in parallel to the “themes” and “concepts” set in motion within the discourses. Only by examining the author “subject” as a variable and complex component of discourse –depriving him of his role as

originator- we can reach a deeper understanding. Within the context of this research, the themes and concepts gathered and classified from the examination of narratives will guide the process of demonstrating how the “author” is instrumental within the social relationships at the time.

Finally, Foucault in his analysis questions the traditional notion of the author defined as a genial creator of his work; endowed with a proliferation of meanings. According to Foucault, the author does not even precede his work. He is rather a functional element in determining what should be included or excluded in a plethora of fiction within a certain culture. He acts as a necessary figure of constraint limiting the free circulation and composition/decomposition of fiction. Foucault thinks that the author is just a way of preventing the deconstructivist infinite proliferation of meaning and is thus related to the fear with which one wants to stop meaning from becoming infinite. In the end, Foucault imagines that the author function and/or the author him or herself would disappear in the future in a proliferating discourse- “all discourses would then develop in the anonymity of a murmur”. But the actual mechanisms of such a change are not explained.

Foucault did not mention Barthes in this essay, however it was seen as a challenge to the “author is dead” manifesto of Barthes. In “The Death of the Author”, Barthes rejects the Romantic concept of “Author-God” and advocates a structuralist/poststructuralist point of view that it is the “language that speaks” not the author (Barthes, 1967). Barthes argues that positivism and capitalist ideology has yielded a big importance to the

author's person, often seeking the explanations to the intricacies of the work in the personality and life story of the author. On the other hand, philosophers like Mallarmé and writers like Proust aimed to deconstruct this myth by substituting language itself for the man. He further elaborates this idea to come up with a historical progression that will liberate the reader from domination by the author.

Barthes disputes the idea that the author preexists the book. He instead argues "modern writer is born simultaneously with his text and every text is eternally written here and now". Therefore, to allocate an author to a text with endless possibilities is to limit it with a final signification, "to close the writing". The multiple meanings and writings in a text enters into a dialogue with each other eventually, into parody, into contestation. And the one place where they are collected and united is the place of the reader, not the author. The destination is the reader and it is no longer personal, as "the reader is a man without history, without biography, without psychology; he is only that someone who holds gathered into a single field all the paths of which the text is constituted." The reader, which has for so long been dismissed and ignored, needs to be "restore writing its future".

Keeping in mind these arguments put forward by Barthes, it is important to emphasize that it is beyond the scope of this research to concentrate on the "place of the reader" where all multiplicity of meanings are collected and united- in the context of this thesis, the audience that consumes the humorous works. However, the debate on "the preeminence of the text over the author" asserted by Barthes, will be taken up at certain stages of the

dissertation, especially where the narratives converge and form a pattern.

In this section, I will also briefly tackle Walter Benjamin's important contribution to the discussions in the literature on the role of "author" in his address delivered at the Institute for the Study of Fascism, Paris, on 27 April 1934, i.e. "The Author as Producer". In this article he makes a differentiation between the two functions of authorship; one requires having the right tendency (commitment) and the other is producing high-quality work. According to Benjamin, the politically correct tendency in the author needs to be complemented with literary value of his work.

Benjamin gives utmost importance to the work's position "within the production relations of the time", i.e. how the author positions himself, not solely as a "man of mind", but within the production process. Being inspired by Brecht's phrase 'functional transformation' by an intelligentsia interested in class struggle and liberating the means of production, he identifies an important difference between "merely supplying a production apparatus and changing it". (Benjamin, 1934: 93) Regardless of the content of the material being revolutionary or not, Benjamin argues that the bourgeois apparatus of production and publication is capable of assimilating revolutionary themes, without questioning its own existence, which is at the core of that critique. (Benjamin, 1934: 94)

Brecht's epic theatre adopted dialogue as its cause, by going back to the most fundamental and original elements of theatre. With the principle of interruption, it always works against creating an illusion among the

audience. It increases the distance between the actors and the spectators and forces the audience to take up a position towards the action. Therefore, during the play, they have moments of reflection, where they have an opportunity to reflect on their won realities. "The purpose of epic theatre is to construct out of the smallest elements of behavior what Aristotelian drama calls action" (Benjamin, 1934:100). By alienating the audience in a lasting manner from the conditions in which it lives, it provokes thought with laughter. What better way to inspire thought than laughter? The following analysis and discussions along the themes of thought, laughter and opposition will use some of the tools provided by W. Benjamin.

CHAPTER 4

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In this section, brief historical background information will be provided to clarify the context in which the following narrations are told. This background dates back to 1980s. 1980 coup d'état represents a breaking point in the Turkish political history eliminating the liberal political gains of the 1970s, which Fatih Tayfur argues to be the most vibrant period of Turkish political history in terms of civil society development and democratization.³ The lasting impact of 1980s coup d'etat is also mirrored in the narrations of humorists when they reflect on their work and its social role within Turkey. After having covered main characteristics of 1990s and 2000s, the historical background will end with a discussion on Gezi Park protests.

4.1. THE 1980S: REPRESSION DISGUISED BY CONSUMPTION

In the 1980s, with the impact of the world economic restructuring represented by the policies of Reagan and Thatcher, Turkish economy also abandoned Keynesian social welfare state ideal and adopted hyper-liberal economic policies (Türel, Köse, Yalman, Aydın & Tayfur, 2004: 42). 24

³ Cumhuriyet Tarihinin Kırılma Noktaları, Mülkiye, 17.2.2004, Cilt: XXVIII, Sayı: 242p.42

January 1980 economic restructuring decisions to adopt export-led economic growth instead of import-substitution policies is followed and actually supported by the 12 September 1980 coup d'état.

The rigid rule of the military coup d'état denouncing and/or restricting all political activity, high surveillance in every sphere of civil life created an environment of fear and submissive behavior among the population. This sociopolitical climate of the 1980s is further complicated by the economic reforms that liberalized the economy and lifted state control in most spheres of financial activity.

The cronyism and the mercantilist nature of the Turkish state became more prominent in the globalization period of 1980s. The economy depended more on distribution of state resources than actual production. A bourgeoisie class lacking industrial traditions and infrastructure, incapable of technological production, ignorant of world markets, sought the easy way out. Public procurement contracts, subsidies and state guaranteed loans became attractive mechanisms of mercantilist sharing of state resources. Using state resources for political gain created a new class of politicians and also citizens that viewed bribe as "legitimate". Abuse of the state resources became commonplace, and was almost naturalized. (Timur, 2004:106)

Parallel to these developments, at the ideological level, social transformation was ensured with the introduction of the Turkish-Islam synthesis (Türk-

İslam sentezi) by the state as the official ideology in 1980s. Left wing organizations and leftist ideology's influence is deliberately reduced. The ANAP government provided support to the big industrialists and led to the conglomeration of companies by contributing to the development of the Islamist capital/Anatolian bourgeoisie through economic incentives.

In the meantime, cities grew to be more diverse and heterogeneous with the increasing immigration from the countryside, while the neighborhood structures and social relations began to transform. At the society level, consumption patterns replaced ideological patterns (Kozanoğlu, 2000: 124-125). The idea of "change" was underlined to give hope to poorer segments of society that their share of the pie would grow to be bigger one day. Gaining status based on consumption began to direct people's desires to be urban, western and well educated. Sectors such as banking, administration and finance emerged as the main engines of the economy and created a new middle class and urban culture (See more detailed discussion regarding the repercussions of the emergence of new middle class on humor in chapter 4.2 Humor as Witty Defense).

In this decade, liberal economic policies coupled with the rigid, anti-democratic post-coup political atmosphere created an uneasy cultural environment. Nurdan Gürbilek defines 1980s as the stage for two different cultural strategies. It was a period of repression, state violence and prohibitions on one hand, while it was a time of unstructured and inclusive power alluding to unprecedented opportunities and promises on the other

hand.

Main developments in the direction of the cultural climate shift in the 1980s are described by Gürbilek as the rise of Islam, Turkey's discovery of its Kurds, the cultural ascent of the rural due to their immigration to big cities and the explosion of desire and sexuality. In this period, the expression of personal tastes and sexual preferences became more widespread. Repressed underground cultural identities surfaced. However, they came back to the cultural stage not with their innocent and genuine content, but as matters of dissent and contestation (Gürbilek, 2001: 8-9).

In the 1980s, the ownership structure of the media also began to change. Big banks and financial groups owned major newspapers and magazines. The interests of the politicians and the financiers were safeguarded through the manipulation of corporate media. This required the camouflage of realities and spreading new values and vacuous concepts in society. Focus was placed on the concept of consensus in order to curb any radical political opposition. A pop history was established where the images and concepts were emptied of their historical significance and meaning and reappropriated by the emerging neoliberal system and its media. The language was incited by the advertisement industry, turning culture into a spectacle.

Gürbilek defines this period as "living in a shop window". The words, people, relationships have slowly turned into displays in a shop window,

only existing to the degree that they are exhibited, exposed and seen. Shopping was not anymore part of the ordinary, daily urban experience; but started to have a purpose in itself. The shopping malls were created as fairs where goods and commodities are exhibited and watched. When the society turns into a shop window, it is just an image of glamour and abundance, hiding the real stories and lives behind. They lose meaning and turn into images as part of the consumer and mass culture (Gürbilek, 2001: 38).

The economic, social and cultural developments in the 1980s had a powerful influence on humor. Economically, neo-liberal policies created an export-promotion model that led to an intensification and centralization of capital. Socially and culturally, the demolition of the sense of “us” and its replacement with “me” led to the dissolution of old neighborhood culture. This transformation also owes to the changes in the media and advertisement culture, which gave birth to a new mass culture and different forms of humor. As a result, the global city began to laugh at a new style of satire.

The shifting life styles resulted in the disappearance/changing form of the familiar “social types”. Humor magazines reflected these changes, as well as different mediums, such as the traditional theatre, cinema and television series. The folk culture characters, such as Karagöz, Nasreddin Hoca and Keloğlan, extending to Kemal Sunal in the movies, found their representation in Gırgır’s good-hearted neighborhood characters, such as *avanak* (idiot), *beter*, *utanmaz* (shameless), *deli* (mad), etc. These characters, representing the larger community values, such as compassion, solidarity

and belonging, slowly faded away as a new urban/mass culture emerged in late 1980s and 1990s. Rougher, individualistic and cynical characters of the new city, representing the “me” identity, replaced them.

More broadly speaking, this period also corresponds with street language being more prominent as the cultural identities began to express themselves. There was a reciprocal interaction between the language and culture of the street and the humor magazines, which still continues today. This mass culture coincided and interacted with the newly immigrated populations, living at the periphery (taşra) of the cities. (Gürbilek, 2001: 102-104). These encounters of class and culture created some of the most subversive and mind-expanding humor, as well as some of the most cynical and superiority-based examples.

4.2. THE 1990S: KURDISH ISSUE, ECONOMIC INSTABILITY AND SHAKY FOUNDATIONS OF NATION STATE AND SECULARISM

Whereas in 1970s class conflict was the defining element of domestic politics only to be replaced by neo-liberalism and consumerism in 1980s, class issues even became more trivial as democracy and human rights revolving around ethnicity issues began to gain prominence in the 1990s. Dissolution of the Soviet Empire in the 1991 brought an end to most communist rule. Also with the weakening of the social welfare state in the 1980s, people started to define themselves as part of diverse ethnic and religious groups as opposed to belonging to a stronger nation state. The concept of citizenship is redefined. The breaking point of 1991 is not specific to Turkey but is a result of developments in the world, emanating from the end of the Cold War

period.

Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu (2009) define the period between 1991-2002 as the time of unstable coalition governments and economic instability. This was compounded by the fact that there were political, economic and natural disasters in this decade, including the PKK terror, rise of political Islam, the 1994 and 1999 financial crisis and finally the disastrous 1999 earthquake.

In 1991, with ANAP losing the general elections, the period of coalition party governments started. Two basic tenets of the nation state were questioned in this period; first, the solidarity of the nation state was disputed by the Kurdish nationalist movement; and secondly the secular nature of the republic was for the first time under debate by the National Outlook (Milli Görüş) movement. The two movements somehow coincided by the fact that the highly conservative segments of the Kurdish population appreciated the universalist discourse of political Islamism of Welfare Party (RP) that distanced itself from Turkish nationalist stand of other parties. Turkey was facing a serious “double” political crisis, which created a sense of confusion and doubt about the national integrity and political stability (Çarkoğlu & Kalaycıoğlu, 2009: 23).

Under these circumstances, in the early 1994, Turkish economy faced a serious financial crisis, when Turkish lira was drastically devalued and inflation increased. The austerity program accepted in April 1994 was a result of negotiations with the IMF. The public regarded the non-transparent, corrupt economic policies of central right parties, including ANAP and DYP as the main reason behind the financial crisis. The RP had the slogan of “adil

düzen" (just order) that stroke a "sensitive public chord" and received a 21.4 percent in 1995 elections (Çarkoğlu & Kalaycıoğlu, 2009: 14).

This grand success of a "Şeriatçı" party with clear ties to religious orders was not a coincidence. The legacy of the military rule of 1980s and its extermination of left-of-center parties set the stage for the political environment of the 1990s. As left parties were weak in terms of their organization and networks, they failed to mobilize the recent *gecekondu* settlers. Other organized movements such as religious sects (*tarikats*) effectively targeted these neighborhoods. Using the ideology of political Islam and traditional social welfare and solidarity networks, they began to fill in the political vacuum left behind by socialists and social democrats. Sectarian communities and Sufi orders, which were banned from politics since 1920s up until 1980s, were influential in creating this political environment (Çarkoğlu & Kalaycıoğlu, 2009: 9).

As a result, Islamic revivalists and ethnic Turkish nationalists gained strength. It was ironical that the supposedly Kemalist military rule was actually very influential in the rise of political Islam to suppress the "challenge of communists". The weakening of the left created an environment where voters rapidly shifted their support to more nationalistic, conservative, and even xenophobic political parties. (Kalaycıoğlu, 2005: 136-138). Instead of defining themselves as left-of-center, or right-of-center, the parties and voters began to be divided as Sunni political Islamist, ethnic Turkish nationalist political movements vs. their Alevi, secularist, or ethnic Kurdish nationalist opponents. Instead of class divisions, income generation

and distribution, the debate shifted to identity, laicism, believers, oppressed and the like.

A new group of conservative intellectuals called the Hearth of Intellectuals (Aydınlar Ocağı) was organized and gained prominence in this period, being also influential in the media. They proposed to establish a synthesis of Turkish nationalism and Islamism, the so-called "Turkish-Islamic Synthesis" (Türk-İslam Sentezi). In Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu's views, in this period Kemalism became the ideology of intellectuals, educated urban middle class and university students, while this ideology was spread to masses. From 1980 to 1997 (RP-DYP coalition government), the influence of Islamic revivalism and traditionalism was felt at all levels of the society, including all levels of educational institutions, media, and political debate (Çarkoğlu & Kalaycıoğlu, 2009: 10).

Another major development of the 1990s was the emergence of Kurdish issue. Between 1991 and 1999, the internal war in the southeast of Turkey increased the death toll by twenty fold, compared to the pre 1990 period (Kalaycıoğlu, 2005:144). Benefiting from the power vacuum in northern Iraq in the post Gulf War period, PKK (Workers Party of Kurdistan) established training camps and recruited young people from the region. The extended embargo imposed by Turkey on Iraq led to economic standstill in the southeast of Turkey. The previously booming economy suddenly coming to a halt created a feeling of social upheaval. The southeast was miserably left behind in terms of economic and social growth with increasing regional unemployment, which contributed to rebellious activity, coupled with

Kurdish unresolved identity issues. The village population was faced with three choices to make a living and to survive: cooperate with PKK, work for the Turkish authorities as “village guards” or immigrate to the western cities. During a decade, southeast of Turkey was a battleground, declared to be in emergency state. 1990s were the period of evacuated villages and forcible evictions by the state (Kalaycıoğlu, 2005: 146).

Becoming part of the EU remained as distant as ever in the 1990s, with the EU policy of “keeping Turkey at bay” for being “too big (population size), too poor (GDP) and too complicated (Muslim population, Kurdish nationalism and political Islam). The harmonization of legislation was only one of the preconditions for EU accession. Issues such as Kurdish conflict and Turkey’s human rights record impeded the accession process. The ethnic tensions in the country were on the rise, however a civic citizenship based on rights and values was not pronounced.

The transformation of society in this decade also owes to changes in the media and advertisement culture, which gave birth to a new mass culture and different forms of humor. The monopoly of state-run television and radio ended in the 1990s with the establishment of private television (1989) and radio (1993) channels. With the major telecommunications infrastructure investments made by Özal government, the state-broadcasting agency (TRT) expanded its coverage to most of the urban households. By 1990, color television sets have entered into the houses of more than 60% of the population.

The absence of regulations on cross-media ownership, and the appeal of the big advertisement pie resulted in some giant conglomerates dominating the media sector, with cross ownership in all media sectors by 1994. There were also extensive vertical and horizontal links between these media giants and other sectors of the economy, such as banking, finance, construction and tourism (Öncü, 2012: 126-128). These intricate and dark relationships rooted in the start-up phase of private broadcasting determine the debates on the independence and quality of media and the freedom to receive objective news even in today's Turkey.

4.3. 2000s: THE DECADE OF CONSERVATISM AND THE RISE OF AKP

The November 2002 election result marked a significant change in terms of a paradigm shift in politics, social and cultural spheres that still continues to shape the 21st century Turkey. The single majority government of AKP was formed after winning 34.2% of the popular vote, gaining 66% of seats in the parliament. The three parties that formed the coalition government after the 1999 elections, failed to even pass the 10% threshold so they were outside the parliament. Throughout the 1990s, unstable coalition governments and their inability to address economic and political reforms, spiralling public debt, inflation were some of the factors that contributed to the success of AKP in 2002 elections. It was also an expression of the anger and reaction to economic populism, clientalism, and corruption.

The serious legitimacy issues the political parties and the system were undergoing in the 1990s were coupled with the ideological dualities, such as laicism vs. anti-laicism, rising nationalism vs. Kurdish insurgency

movement. There was a need for a new political center to achieve a social consensus and AKP fit into the space of a new center that responded to this need. They set out to implement a program required by historical and contextual conditions. Özkazaç defines this program as “a neo-liberal globalization program routed towards EU” depending on the “rationalization” of the restructuration process as well as the “consolidation” of the liberal democracy (Özkazaç, 2012:116). They represented a break from the corrupt image of the 1990s. It is only a twist of faith that AKP government will become the epicenter of all these deficiencies after 12 years in power.

The reasons behind AKP’s success also have deep-seated roots in the composition and texture of Turkish society. In an empirical study conducted by Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu in 2009, authoritarianism, dogmatism, old fashioned values, low self-esteem and intolerance are around 60 % prominent in respondents, most of which have rural backgrounds and vote for right wing conservative parties. Tradition often includes parochial values and a fear of “alien agents and their domestic conspirators”. Instead of relying on one’s individual judgment and intelligence, the decision-making is often times delegated to an older, religious authority figure in the family or neighborhood. While Turkish conservatism allows for economic change and entrepreneurship, it is skeptical of modernization, secularism and changing gender roles (Çarkoğlu & Kalaycıoğlu, 2009: 56-57).

Some other reflections of this sharp turn to the right in Turkey are correlated with the low level of social protest. Research indicates that Turkey is a

country with much lower levels of protest potential than almost all other consolidated democracies. Protest and repression potentials are reduced by conservatism and religiosity. Also tolerance for others and different lifestyles and ideas are negatively correlated with increasing conservatism. However, increasing conservatism/religiosity is positively correlated with interpersonal trust among fellow Muslims. Yet, in the same society, tolerance to people from different religions and lifestyles decreases (Çarkoğlu & Kalaycıoğlu, 2009: 116).

The scarcity of social capital undermines the development of civil society, initiative and civic activism. Religious brotherhoods and ethnic solidarity associations fill this vacuum; further dividing the sociopolitical terrain into closed groups based more on ascriptive and parochial values. If they are well organized, they mobilize critical number of voters through patronage ties. This development results not in the “empowerment” of people but rather these limited, primordial clicks. “Democracy in Turkey seems to favor the leaders and followers of such primordial patronage groups as sheiks, imams, landlords, mafia bosses, and the like.” (Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu, 2009: 118-119)

The relatively modernized, urban, middle class do not seem to have created a social capital base to mobilize and form a viable political force. Their protests are limited to intense, yet short-lived reactions, such as the Republican Demonstrations of June and July 2007. There is no long-term, sustainable commitment. The primordial patronage groups are more effective in terms of influencing politics and have done well both under democratic and

authoritarian governments. This process, nevertheless, had gone hand-in-hand with corruption.

AKP 'managed' to turn the conservative tendency into an increasingly authoritarian, closed and oppressive regime in the first twelve years of its rule. It defined its legitimacy on the victimization of its Muslim brothers and sisters and Sunni Muslim religiosity. They have also managed to take over the control of the state resources from the control of so-called "center" and established the distribution networks of these material resources to their supporters. This was a process that started with the import substitution and liberal economic policies initiated in the 1980s.

Initially AKP government created political and economic stability, made some important legal and constitutional changes to meet the requirements of Copenhagen criteria to start full negotiations with the EU. It defined itself as a "conservative democrat" party with moderate Islamic discourse (Çarkoğlu, & Kalaycıoğlu, 2009: 19) Especially, in the first five to eight years of the AKP rule, there was a euphoria that AKP was providing the solution to reconcile the ideal of a secular democratic state with a majority of Muslim population, governed by universal norms of human rights and liberal economy.

The intellectual bloc that collaborated with Özal on the grounds of political liberalism and "second republicanism" extended their support also to AKP. The liberal intellectuals regarded AKP as the force that could cut the cord with the "the first republic"- an actor capable and willing to establish the "New Turkey" pronounced since the 1980s of neoliberal era. AKP identified

itself with the periphery and Anatolian bourgeoisie, so the liberal intellectuals did not hesitate to consider AKP's rise as the conjunction between the state and society. As the party seemed to challenge the strong state tradition and the influence of military on political life, it was perceived as a pioneer of democratization of political system and establishment of a stronger civil society.

The fact that AKP reproduced the authoritarian state structure in line with its own interests escaped the attention of most liberal intellectuals during the first decade of AKP's term in power. As AKP initially presented a convergence between Islam and democracy, as well as Islam and neoliberalism, the intellectuals viewed it as "an alternative way of modernization" (Uzgel, 2010: 24).

As the bureaucratic and authoritarian state structure and the elitist political cadres are seen behind the many problems related to democratization (Bedirhanoğlu, 2010: 53), the consolidation and abuse of power in the hands of an elected government didn't cause much alarm until recently. The equation between civilianization and democracy seemed rational in light of the recent history of a series of military interventions. However, regarding AKP as the sole actor seeking democratization failed to come true. The "New Turkey" turned out to be AKP's "conservative-Islamist social engineering" and majoritarian authoritarian rule. (Açıkel, 2012) This eventually caused the country to reach a climax, which erupted the Gezi Park protests.

4.4. THE 2013 GEZI PARK PROTESTS: HUMOR AS A TOOL TO CLAIM “RIGHT TO THE CITY”

Triggered by what the masses perceived as a corrupt and non-transparent redevelopment of public space, the protests exploded countrywide in June 2013 and signalled a historic shift in modern Turkish politics. Fueled by rapid advances in communications technology and social media platforms, the evolving and expanding role of art and humor in political discourse was witnessed in Turkey’s Gezi Park uprising – the country’s largest social upheaval in decades. Humor, graffiti and subversive art created the major spaces for non-hegemonic and dissident discourse during the protests.

These protests were especially important in terms of the alternative humorous discourse produced by the younger, intellectual population influenced by Turkey’s deep and rich tradition of humor, especially the cartoon magazines. Independent weekly humor magazines, such as *Leman*, *Penguen* and *Uykusuz*, were instrumental in influencing the political and social outlook of the Gezi generation, who grew up reading these low-cost, colorful, disposable and communal cartoon media. A comprehensive overview of the satirical representations in the independent and underground cartoon magazines, present hints about the youth subculture and its non-hegemonic and dissident reflections during a mainly youth-based social movement in Gezi.

Turkey’s June 2013 Gezi Park uprising created a previously unprecedented sense of community disputing the authority, through songs, poems, street art

and humor. Critical humor used during the Gezi Park protests subverted the hegemonic discourse of those in power. The protesters, 63.6% of whom were 19-30 years of age, responded to the power holders' public discourse with their own humorous language created commonly in a festival-like setting.

While the political authorities aimed to present the image that they are serving the interests of the people, they stigmatized rebellious populace as "bandits" and "looters" to legitimize their authority. Jokes of the protestors, on the other hand, appropriated and culture-jammed, i.e. ironically altered, and subverted the originally intended meaning of this polarizing discourse. The youth came up with such creative jokes and puns that even the cartoonists interviewed during this research expressed that they were challenged and considered new ways to keep up with the humor on the streets. Gezi Park uprising seems to have hit the humorists in such a way that they questioned their work and its social role in a profound way.

CHAPTER 5

HUMORISTS' NARRATIVES ON THE SOCIAL ROLE OF HUMOR IN TURKEY

This PhD research entailed open-ended, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a wide range of humor creators. These creators belong to three different groups, based on their age and decades they have been most productive in. There is a group of humorists who were born in 1940s and produced as early as 1960s and 1970s. The second group of humorists belongs to a generation that was born in the 1960s and was producing humorous content starting from 1970s. The last generation of humorists interviewed was much younger (mostly born in 1980s) and were active in the millennium.

There are four main themes that emerged during this fieldwork regarding the social role and function of humor. The most frequent social role of humor enunciated by the respondents was humor acting as an “oppositional force in society”. Out of 48 respondents, 27 asserted that this was the most important role of humor in Turkish society. The other subthemes that emerged under this title include “being critical of the system”, “pointing out the flaws in society and the ruling parties”, “siding with the underdog”, and “rebellion”. This theme coincided with the conflict approach to humor, which regards humor as a means of expressing discontent and associates it with social

conflict.

On the other hand, a set of narratives so heavily concentrated on a specific theme such as “opposition” and “rebellion” may actually be hiding something. It might be even serving to empty the real meaning of those concepts and create the illusion in people’s minds that humor actually serves as a tool of real opposition. What humor actually serves may be the social role of “safety valve” and “venting off pressure” by reassuring people that their voices are somewhat heard.

While this thesis does not set out to “judge” in any way what the “real” meaning might be behind these narratives, the researcher strived to preserve an open mind not to take each statement at face value but read between the lines and link each narrative with one another to unearth the continuities, conflicts or disruptions within the set of narratives. What the research aims to do, is to locate these narratives, which define “social role of humor” as an object in the recent Turkish Republican history in a broader sociopolitical context.

During the interviews, the second most frequently uttered theme on the social role of humor was the *“expression of feelings and thoughts in a witty manner”*. Out of 48 respondents interviewed, 17 focused on this aspect as the main function of humor in Turkish society. Other subthemes that emerged under this title can be summarized as “humor as a safety valve”, “the exaltation and relief that someone finally voiced my concerns”, almost a feeling of “revenge”. On the other hand, 6 respondents defined the mission

of humor as *“a tool for dealing with violent assaults and defending oneself”*. These statements and the themes engrained in them were related to each other, and the specific time and place they were uttered. This theme also resonates with conflict approach, which evaluates humor’s social role to be a weapon and a defense mechanism, expressing resistance.

The third most common enunciated social role of humor during the interviews was its anti-depressant and therapy function. Out of 48 respondents that participated in this research, 15 of them stated that humor served as *an anti-depressant & a therapy mechanism* in Turkish society. On a similar note, 11 interviewees argued that humor gave *strength, hope and a sense of carrying on* by creating *a breath of fresh air, a new way of looking at things*. This social role corresponds with functionalist approaches that focus on humor’s ability to stabilize and transform the anger in society.

The last theme that will be analyzed is *“humor as a tool for increasing communication and tolerance”* (8 respondents) and thus *“facilitating community formation through a strong fellow-feeling and common binding language among its audience* (13 respondents). The feature of humor to be self-deprecating and retrospective (*the theme of self-reflection through humor*) was also raised by 11 of the respondents, forming a unity of statements with the above-mentioned themes. It is important to point out that the creation of a common binding language also indicates the formation of an outside boundary, which most often targets the oppressiveness of those in power. Therefore, this theme presents a combination of social cohesion and conflict approaches.

5. 1. HUMOR AS OPPOSITION, REBELLION & FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Leaving Taksim Square, at the beginning of Siraselviler Street, a small door with a narrow winding set of stairs once led to one of the most famous nightclubs in Istanbul. In Siraselviler Klüp 12, Devekuşu Kabare played to a full house for twenty years since 1967. Before Klüp 12, they were performing in a small space next to the Belgium consulate in Istanbul. "Upstairs they would play horse race bets, downstairs was a sauna. We would perform in the middle floor. Here is humor for you!" exclaimed Metin Akpınar during the interview. Having acted on the stage of Devekuşu Kabare from 1967 to 1987 as one of the main actors, he is now a 74-year-old man teaching "cabaret theatre" classes in a private college in İstanbul.

Initiated by Haldun Taner, Zeki Alasya, Metin Akpınar and Ahmet Gülhan, this cabaret performed until 1992. They broke new ground in Turkish comedy theatre with their satire show, which blended traditional theatre techniques, with witty and absurd commentary on contemporary social and political events. When their latest cabaret show- Geceler (Nights)- was found to be obscene by the Censorship Board, all its recordings were destroyed. Their most famous plays Aşk Olsun (Let There Be Love), Beyoğlu Beyoğlu, Deliler (The Madmen), Dün Bugün (Yesterday, Today), Reklamlar (Advertisements) and Yasaklar (Prohibitions) were first sound recorded and then video taped, watched by millions.

Especially in the 1970s and 1980s, cabaret theatre acted as a powerful medium of satirical comedy in Turkey. Devekuşu played to full theatres even

during the pre-1980 coup d'etat period when people were scared to go out on the street. Defining "cabaret theatre", Metin Akpınar emphasized the fact that cabaret theatre first emerged as a response to rising fascism in Germany when Hitler came to power after a supposedly legitimate election.



Figure 3. Zeki Alasya and Metin Akpınar on Devokuşu Kabare stage in the 1980s. Cumhuriyet photo.

In Akpınar's words:

It is a theatre of rebellion, satire and irony. It is contemporary, not illusionary. It has a stimulant effect. It brings the truth on stage; it aggrandizes and turns a pimple into acne. It underlines the mistakes and makes them obvious.

The most frequently enunciated social function of humor during the

interviews conducted for this PhD thesis was humor acting as a “rebellious/oppositional force in society”, “pointing out the faults of politicians and being critical of the system”. Out of 48 respondents, 27 asserted that this was the most important role of humor in Turkish society. The other subthemes that emerged under this title include “being critical of the system”, “pointing out the flaws in society and the ruling parties”, “siding with the underdog”, and “rebellion”. Some other issues that came up in the discussions around this theme were political repression, freedom of expression, the boundaries of humor (conscience vs. self-censorship), implied expressions, and the idealism and social responsibility of an artist to carry society forward.

While the participants choose to focus on the social role of humor as a force of “opposition” and “rebellion”, reading between the lines, a conflicting narrative regarding superiority humor also surfaces during the interviews. As a sociological concept, superiority is also crucial for examining the dynamics among different classes within society. Certain narratives of the humorists, when they were describing their role in the humor production, deserve attention when discussing superiority humor. For instance, Metin Akpınar declares that they regarded theatre as a “bourgeoise art”.

Only those who had the money to spend came to our plays. That’s why we made fun of the lumpen proletariat class for years. The audience laughed as we hit the poor fellows. They did not generally laugh at the civilization jokes made by Haldun Taner⁴. After our

⁴ Haldun Taner is the founder of Devekuşu Kabare and has written most of its plays. He did his first cabaret theatre in 1962 with “Bu Şehri Stambul Ki ‘62” in Klüp Gen-Ar. After writing “Vatan Kurtaran Şaban”, which he calls the “virtuoso of cabaret theatre”, he set up the first professional satirical cabaret theatre in Turkey; “Devekuşu Kabare” in 1967 and it was their first play on stage.

theatre grew and attracted the masses, we realized what was right and wrong. We didn't hit the poor and ignorant folks anymore, but rather the ones who created those conditions. So we were more critical of power holders, not the ones who were powerless, yet not faulty of their lower standing in society.

From this account, it is clear that Deve Kuşu Kabare resorted to "superiority humor" especially in its earlier years, making fun of "below average", "uncivilized", poor masses. They used this type of humor, when they had the perception that their audience was more educated and wealthy. The fact that the audience laughed at these types of jokes, could be interpreted as the function of humor, whether it is critical or not, to make the audience feel better about themselves by looking at worse scenarios or people. While Metin Akpınar argues that theatre is "the art of empathy", he still confesses that people do not question themselves much in Turkish society. "If the one on stage is a hero, that's me. If he is not a hero, then he is the other". But he still carries the hope that theatre can act as a corrector of this lack of self-reflection.

This narrative also brings to mind Walter Benjamin's "The Author as Producer" article mentioned in the methodology section. In this article, Benjamin questions the position of a work (and its author) vis-à-vis the social production relations of its time (Benjamin, 1934: 87). He argues that the writer should not only be in solidarity with the proletariat in his mind, but also as a producer aiming to change those relations of social production. The author's place in the class struggle is determined on the basis of his position within the production process. Benjamin gives Bertolt Brecht as the genuine example of a progressive intelligentsia interested in "liberating the means of

production” by his epic theatre (Benjamin, 1934: 93-94).

Just like the theatre of Brecht, the cabaret theatre of Haldun Taner used the method of breaking the fourth wall between the actors and the audience. In this way, the actors did not identify with their roles and pretend the world on stage is real. As Haldun Taner expressed; “everyone needs to act different compositions in various sketches in the cabaret theatre; an older man in one sketch and then a child in the next one. Jumping headfirst to various roles and playing fast is one trait of a cabaret actor” (Gürün, 2006).

When asked about the period when the cabaret theatre was most active and popular in Turkey, Metin Akpınar focused on the decade in the aftermath of the 1980 coup d’état. As mentioned in the section on “Periodization”, the periodization of the thesis is not determined randomly, but is rather based on the breaking points and discontinuities in the narrations of the humorists interviewed regarding history and their role in it per se. And one of those breaking points was 1980s coup d’état, which was mentioned by a majority of humorists, while they were defining their work within the context of political and social developments taking place in the country.

Following the 1980 coup d’État, all political power was consolidated in the hands of the National Security Council (NSC), composed of generals from the military. Kenan Evren, who was the mastermind of the coup, was officially declared the head of state. The martial law created a series of rigid, anti-democratic regulations and practices restricting basic human rights. A comprehensive surveillance mechanism was put in place to monitor

everyone, but especially people involved in politics. All members of political or student associations were regarded as a source of threat defined as “anarchists” in the eyes of the military rule. Labeling and categorizing opponents was one of the ideological tools used by the ruling elite and operated as part of their patriotic and religious discourse.

In 1982, a new constitution was approved by 92 % of the votes and Kenan Evren became the new president. This constitution aimed to restrict the freedoms provided by the 1961 constitution that the military regarded as a “loose shirt”. Therefore the rules of discourse formation during this period were influenced by imposed limits on what could be said or not. Strikes and lockouts were prohibited; the labor unions were banned from politics. State of emergency law was passed and state security courts were established. The women and youth branches of political parties were shut down.

The political repression at the time and how it affected their cabaret theatre was discussed during the interview. Metin Akpınar gave a few examples of warnings during the implementation of martial law. He described one example as follows, with a bitter smile in his face:

Our theater was never prohibited. When we anticipated such a move, we went on vacation. We only got caught in İzmir. The commander during the martial rule censored 40-45 minutes of the play. Apparently the youth, who watched our cabaret protested outside later on. They accused us of provoking the youth. In the next play, I gave the recipe for eggplant kebab and we played backgammon to fill up the allotted time.

This statement alludes to the fact that there is a “sense” of what is too much

in the eyes of the authorities and can be prohibited. Even though they performed a courageous theatre of satire for years, they at the same time sought to avoid that immediate confrontation and “go on vacation” when such a possible clash is on the horizon. When a certain part of their play is censored, they find a way around the censorship. Akpınar within this discussion also put forward his ideas on the tradition of dissent in this country:

We are not a country used to political satire (hiciv). Nef'i, the Ottoman satirical poet was strangled in Topkapı Palace. There were others who were executed by hanging. Aziz Nesin's Marko Paşa satirical magazine was shot down by the authorities five times and had to reopen with different names.

The narrative above is uttered from a 74-year-old veteran humorist, who has witnessed and produced in the last several decades of the Republic. Starting from the Ottoman Empire, and extending through the Turkish Republican history, there have always been cycles of repression and relative freedom in public debate and expression. Humor has been one of the powerful tools used to fight this repressive tendency and challenge the authorities' discourse. Humor magazines have been significant tools in this struggle.

The following quotation by Behiç Pek is a reflection on the sociopolitical context, as well as his place as an 'author' within that context. Behiç Pek, who is a respected, older and down-to-earth cartoonist of *Leman* satirical humor magazine and creator of the well-known “Muhlis Bey” character with Latif

Demirci in Girgır⁵, describes the post 1980 coup d'état period as follows:

In the post September 12, coup d'état environment, people's freedom of expression was restricted to a great extent, it was a depressing, difficult time. It felt good to see a character like Muhlis Bey, who could express himself freely without any inhibitions. He has no filter and says whatever he likes, regardless of right or wrong. It was an extreme, abnormal character, which brought some relief to people. Those days everything was prohibited and Girgır had very high sales figures.

B. Pek, as a creative subject, comments on the restricted "freedom of expression" at a certain period in history and reflects on how humor production mirrored the conditions at the time. An almost absurd cartoon character with no filters on what he says could be refreshing and comforting at a time of such rigid boundaries.

Freedom of expression in one way or the other is seen as a crucial aspect of humor, especially at times of tight political control, prohibitions and repression, such as the 1980 post coup d'état period. One of Devekuşu Kabare's skits in their play Yasaklar (Prohibitions) present clear examples that reflect the spirit of the time and the restrictions imposed on daily life. In the beginning of the show, there is a conversation between two men acted out by Metin Akpınar and Zeki Alasya. One is trying to get home, while the other is preventing anyone that wants to walk in a certain direction he is guarding. As that direction is the only way to get to his house, Metin Akpınar, quite disturbed, questions this illogical, out of the blue ban. Zeki

⁵ Girgır is a legendary satirical humor magazine initiated in 1973 and became one of the highest selling humor magazines in the world soon after. More detail on its background is provided in the next analysis chapter.

Alasya's response is based on the fear culture: "What kind of an anarchist are you? Do you want to go back to terrible days before September 12?"

The justification for the ban resonates with the post-coup mentality of surveillance and repression over the society. It is exemplified by the almost absurd explanation of the authority figure: "There is freedom in this country. Everyone can go to his or her home. But you cannot pass through this road, because this road is dangerous, this road is filled with obstacles and bottlenecks. There are bumps on this road. These prohibitions are implemented for your own good, why don't you get it?" This comment is indisputably a reference to the fear environment defining the day and age, resulting in restrictions on many aspects of the individual life and freedoms.

A different skit in *Yasaklar* takes place in a holiday camp run by a militaristic manager. In this camp, anything one can think of is prohibited. The camp manager, characterized by Zeki Alasya, calls the camp a "family camp" for rest and recuperation, intervening and separating a couple walking close to each other. He even names the guy an "octopus with nine arms". He wants a guy walking by to change his swimming suit to a different style. Finally the father of a family watching these events has a conversation with the manager and can't help but ask, "Where did you place the gas chambers?"

In this skit, there are also traces of incongruous humor, as the dictator-like, militaristic attitude is out of place and absurd in a holiday camp, where people expect to be free and enjoy themselves. This misplacement only makes sense when one considers that the holiday camp is only an allegory

for the country and the militaristic camp manager striving to “establish law and order” by restricting human freedoms very much resembles the character of Kenan Evren and other military officials.

This skit also brings to mind the absurd rules and regulations of National Security Council in the 1980s, such as “all shopkeepers should paint the dustbins in front of their shops to blue or black, otherwise they will be arrested”, “weddings are permitted, however any rampage should be avoided.” “All the houses on the highway must be painted white, otherwise they look unkempt and primitive.” All children’s names that were not in conformity with national culture and traditions were banned. All political slogans were prohibited. Kenan Evren Boulevard or 12 September Street were the new address names to better reflect “Turkish national unity”. A comprehensive surveillance mechanism was put in place to monitor people involved in politics (Birand, 1998).

The post coup d’etat period seen from the eyes of another cartoonist, Tan Cemal Genç, also reflects the darkness and suffocation felt by the creators of humorous works at the time:

That period was much harsher; there were even times when we had to change the cover of the magazine. Güneri İçoğlu, Şükrü Yavuz and Tuncay Akgün were charged with court cases. Güneri İçoğlu had to stay in prison for his phrase: “Zonta Türkler.” The influence of September 12 was still in the air. Despite that, Limon magazine presented the best examples of opposition humor.

In this narrative, the repressive political background, is correlated with

production of humor and how humorists have reacted with one of humor's main social functions; "opposition".

5.1.1. WHAT IS CRITICAL HUMOR?

Before setting out to explore humor's most common social role/function in the narratives of the interviewees, it is important to highlight the different interpretations of what "being critical" or "political humor" meant according to the humorists interviewed. While some respondents chose to articulate a more traditional, orthodox elucidation of "critical" solely in the context of current, daily political struggles and conflicts; others preferred to use it in a much broader sense of "having an open mind, devoid of dogmas" that applies to all spheres of life, not just daily politics.

There is also a second major difference in opinions among the interviewees. While some of the earlier generation (the humorists born in 1940s and 1950s) saw themselves as missionaries with the objective of "correcting the flaws of the society" in order to "improve" it; the youngest generation born in 1980s don't seem to burden themselves with such a mission. In this context, the discourse formation in the earliest generation diverges significantly from the later generations. There is an emphasis on humor and art to be critical, progressive, aiming to improve the society and move it forward. For instance Müjdat Gezen, who was born in 1943 and been involved in theatre since 1967, defines humor and art to be "critical by nature". In his words:

Doing the contrary would be eulogy; the examples of which were present in the Ottoman Empire and they would praise the Sultan and the other rulers and received their gold in return. The ones that

raised criticism were punished with jail sentence. Nothing has changed since then. Humor does not praise; it wouldn't be humor if it praises.

M. Gezen's narrative has elements that relates to the statements of M. Akpınar on the nature of humor and how authorities tend to respond to it.

The humorists, who have been producing in this field even before the 1980 coup d'etat and had the opportunity to compare and shape, as first hand subjects, the interaction between the political machinery and the act of humor production, have a tendency to place themselves in a position to be judgmental and all-knowing about the social role of humor. M. Gezen, for instance, made a comparison between his generation and the younger humorists, with a slight tone of condescension:

The ones, who do stand-up comedy today, should use criticism, but they don't. Of course, you cannot interfere or impose on an artist. It is good that different content is produced, however one wonders why none of them does critical comedy. Once, the late Erol Günaydın asked Beyazıt Öztürk in a live show: "Müjdat Gezen, Levent Kırca, Ferhan Şensoy all do critical comedy, why don't you do it?" "We are scared, brother" he responded. This was enough of an answer for me to understand. What can I say? We are not afraid, brother".

Similar to Müjdat Gezen, Şevket Altuğ who was born in 1943 and involved in theatre, television and cinema since 1962 defines "a sense of duty and responsibility" for the artist.

If the artist has a good formation and has thought it through before setting on that path; he/she carries a responsibility towards his/her society and country. This responsibility involves being a

locomotive, carrying the taste of the society one step further. The ones that do not have this responsibility either float high above society making elitist movies or choose the easy way out by stupid, grotesque comedies. The whole issue is moving slightly ahead of the society. If the artists act in accordance with that responsibility, they will feel clean in their conscience.

Concepts such as 'conscience' and 'responsibility' are enunciated much more frequently and form part of the vocabulary set of respondents, who spent their formative years during the 1960s and 1970s. The humorists, who have lived both before and after the 1980 coup d'etat and experienced the political and social change, express certain boldness, "a lack of fear" and an emphasis for art and humor to be "critical of the status quo and the ones in power." These concepts are not emphasized as elements of the narratives on "social role of humor" by the interviewees, who were born in later generations.

Umur Bugay, who was the scenario writer for some Deveküşü Kabare plays (Haneler, Reklamlar), scriptwriter of some of the well-known social comedy movies from 1970s and 1980s⁶, as well as long-lasting comedy TV series, such as Bizimkiler, argues that only people who do not deceive themselves can produce humor. He stated that:

It is important to see how social classes and the relationships of oppression function in society. A good humor text is a result of reading daily politics in a deep way. If you can portray the social gestus⁷ of your character properly, the audience receives it in a

⁶ İşte Hayat (1976), Kapıcılar Kralı (1976), Çöpçüler Kralı (1978), Postacı (1984), Yoksul (1986), Davacı (1986), Düttürü Dünya (1988), etc.

⁷ Gestus is an acting technique developed by the German theatre practitioner Bertolt Brecht. It carries the sense of a combination of physical gestures and "gist" or attitude. It is a means by which "an attitude or single aspect of an attitude" is revealed, insofar as it is "expressible in words or actions." Gestus, as the embodiment of an attitude, carries at least two distinct meanings in Brecht's theatre:

glance. For that, you need to place your character within the right socioeconomic base. Humorists should have a nihilist, destructive potential to deconstruct the given social values and norms. It requires being able to see the devilish side of events. As a humorist, I am against all fanaticism and dogmatism. Only philosophy and science can enlighten mankind.

In this account, there is an emphasis on the significance of economic and social relations of production, class relations, socioeconomic concerns of lower classes and how they are also being squeezed by externally imposed repressive social norms. This narrative also coincides to some extent with many other interviewees that belong to the same generation as it underlines significance of economic and social relations/conditions, with a hint of positivism, idealized vision of science and progress, keeping a distance to religious and other types of dogma.

In order to understand what Bugay means by “social gestus”, it is important to give an example of one of the tragicomedy movie scripts written by him in 1988, *Düştürü Dünya*. Directed by Zeki Ökten and the main character acted by Kemal Sunal, the movie depicts the story of a clarinet player living in the slums of Ankara with a small income, trying to get by. The movie accurately reflects the atmosphere of 1980s and critically deals with the spreading slums, corruption in the construction sector, while representing the humane story of a lower class musician and his family.

Similar to Umur Bugay, Yasemin Yalçın, who is an actress mostly known for

first, the uncovering or revealing of the motivations and transactions that underpin a dramatic exchange between the characters; and second, the "epic" narration of that character by the actor (whether explicitly or implicitly).

her comedy shows on TV, expressed similar views on the social role and mission of humor to be critical:

We are in opposition to everything. Even if we share the ruling party's political views, we would still be opposing certain policies, as there is always a better way to do things. When there is no humor, there won't be any progress. As the clown makes a fool out of the king, comic is a defense and assault at the same time. That is why they are scared of us.

In Y. Yalçın's statement, similar concepts of "progress" and seeking "a better way to do things" are emphasized. The early republican ideals of modernity, science, rationality, etc. are reflected in the humorists' statements as the artist's mission of being a guiding, enlightened force in the service of society.

In this narrative, besides the social role of humor "being a source of opposition", there are also traces of the second theme of humor perceived as "a tool for dealing with violent assaults and defending oneself". Cross-links between different thematic threads of narratives occur, as there is generally more than one social function of humor expressed by the respondents. However, there is usually one function that outstands, while the other roles serve as supportive functions.

Erdil Yaşaroğlu, who comes from a different genre, humor style and is much younger, concurs with some of the statements uttered by Yasemin Yalçın. Born in 1971 and currently working as one of the editors of a well-read humor magazine Penguen, E. Yaşaroğlu argues that:

When we talk about humor, we are talking about an art that is born to break taboos. Humor stands in opposition. It is in humor's nature. I can't draw a cartoon that says, "Hey Prime Minister, I like the rising inflation!" - it won't be funny. Penguen started out in 2002, and since then they blamed us for criticizing AK Party for the last twelve years. But there was no other ruling party since we started. We struggle with whomever is in power. We also criticized the military, including the general staff. It could be soldiers, politicians or the apartment superintendent. We rebel against authority.

This black and white division between humorist vs. authority and attributing the "opposition duty" to the humorist was less pronounced in the statements of the some other interviewees. They constituted of humorists, who preferred to define critical humor in a broader sense with concepts, such as "having an open mind, devoid of dogmas". For instance, Bahadır Baruter, who is one of the most controversial figures of humor in Turkey due to his unique and bold style, defines critical humor, not solely in terms of a struggle between the ruling power and its opposition. He chooses to rather focus on humorists' social intelligence and ability to question the taken-for-grantedness of certain taboos and rules engrained in society. Defining his style of humor, he stated:

I have always liked harsh and strong humor, i.e. humor that pokes at sexual taboos and conformist, hypocritical middle class morals. Everywhere around the world, that is what satirical humor means. What makes humor political is not only its relation to daily political agenda. If it is revolutionary in terms of its social intelligence and has a bold side that breaks taboos, that is real politics.

Kemal Kenan Ergen, a 48-year-old writer who has worked at several humor magazines over the years and afterwards written comedy movie scripts, also

emphasizes the oppositional character of humor from a much broader perspective:

A humorist does not have to draw Süleyman Demirel and Tayyip Erdoğan cartoons, but his stance towards life needs to be nonconformist. A person with dogmas cannot be nonconformist. They used to call me apolitical at the humor magazine because I didn't call myself leftist. For me, it is not about right or left wing; it is about having individual opinions, political views and ethical understanding on marriage, gender, sex, etc. For years, they thought being political is taking sides in this country. But the kids, who were regarded as being apolitical, ended up turning a dictator into a monkey at Gezi Park protests. They were not all left wing or Alevis. In June 2013, we have seen that Turkish society is individualized and urbanized. Therefore, humor requires a nonconformist look at not just politics, but all issues related to life. A humorist should reflect upon all the preexisting rules; become irritated not just by Hitler, but also Stalin, Lenin and Atatürk. Humorist rejects both.

This narrative of Kemal Kenan Ergen points out to an understanding within the humor magazines about what being “political” meant. He gives a different definition of “political” that goes beyond the orthodox right and left wing separation, which was mostly influential during the 1980s when he was working at the humor magazine. The traces of a sense of exclusion due to this ideologically influenced environment are witnessed in the narratives of other cartoonists, such as Cumhuriyet's editorial cartoonist, Behiç Ak. Drawing editorial cartoons in the newspaper since the 1980s, the 58-year-old architect and cartoonist, Behiç Ak defines the style of humor before 1980s as follows:

Daily life was not criticized much back then, there was a symbolic understanding based on ideologies. Political symbolism did a lot of

harm to the society and emptied concepts of their real meanings. Think of a man who is a real macho and tries to oppress people from lower classes in his daily life but he claims that he is socialist, or even a feminist. I first tried to criticize the “individual” by drawing cartoons on lifestyle. I abstained from using clichés and stereotypes. They are not political in terms of daily political agenda, but they are extremely political for handling unspoken aspects of social change. Politics is not only done in the parliament, it covers the whole social life.

Based on these narratives, there is a great deal of convergence among the humorists, with more than half of the respondents, defining one of the main social roles of humor as being an oppositional force in society. However, there are divergences in the narratives about what actually constitutes “opposition”. While some choose to define “opposition” as being solely against the ruling party or an authority figure, others focus on its mind-opening, non-conformist and non-dogmatic outlook.

There are even those, who argue that “being political” doesn’t help the humorist at all in the long run. METin ÜSTündağ is one of the most influential names in humor magazines since the 1980s and now works as the editor of Penguen. He has also produced and still produces literature, culture, arts, street, humor magazines, such as Öküz, Hayvan and Ot. According to him:

A humorist should not be expected to be personally involved in politics, such as signing the Intellectuals’ Petition (Aydınlar Dilekçesi). Aziz Nesin, on the contrary should make fun of such an action. Woody Allen doesn’t have such a concern. He makes movies every year. He doesn’t think “what the hell is gonna happen to America?”

This narrative uttered by a humorist, who has actually been involved in critical humor for decades, carries hints of bitterness for lack of any real political or social change in a country. A country, whose “older humorists tend to also get bitter as they age” in Met-Üst’s words... How about the younger humorists and their outlook on the social role of humor, especially when it comes to its political repercussions?

5.1.2. DOES HUMOR MAKE YOU THINK?

As mentioned earlier on in this chapter, there exists a second major difference in opinion among the interviewees. While some of the older generation defines humor as having a mission to improve society, the youngest generation of humorists, born in 1980s, do not seem to believe in such a social mission. Ece Ercan, a 34-year-old comedian, who overflows with nervous energy, has been involved in theatre and stand-up comedy since 2005. When interviewed, she stated the following on the social role of humor:

I am not on stage to give political messages. The only objective is to make people laugh. I usually touch upon generic topics outside the scope of political agenda; such as animal rights, “divine justice”, or older ladies’ watching and cursing at marriage shows on TV. People don’t get upset or irritated over such topics.

By abstaining from “sensitive issues” such as politics or religion, Ercan’s stand-up act indirectly expresses her perceptions regarding what is expected of good comedy in today’s Turkey. Timid of being a woman stand-up comedian, she confesses that her male counterparts and the audience observe

her with prejudice. This is coupled by her assumptions of today's society about what constitutes good humor.

Ercan actually conforms to those expectations, which she defines to be "making people laugh". Contrary to some of the earlier statements asserting that humor is "inherently" critical, or it is humor's "nature" to be oppositional, this young comedian solely focuses on what causes laughter. When asked whether humor has a mission to change opinion or, is a cowardly act reaffirming what people already think (Provenza-Leno, 2010: 109), she said:

I agree with Jay Leno (famous American stand-up comedian) that it reinforces the already existing views. When the person on stage says something contrary to your ideas, you start thinking and reasoning in your mind. At that point you are at a different wavelength, i.e. "thinking". When you are thinking, you easily get irritated and you can't laugh. I had a few rough jokes initially but then I omitted them. In reality, people come here to clear their heads. *My aim is not to teach anything, I want to make people laugh. That's why I do not touch sensitive topics like politics and religion.* Devekuşu Kabare did political humor back in the day. Nowadays people are very aggressive, they could say "What?! Did you just insult my prime minister?"

While this narrative shows clear signs of how a comedian applies self-censorship, it also tackles the cliché of "making people think while laughing", a buzzword that appealed to earlier generations. As witnessed from this statement, this idea seems to have lost ground among younger generation Turkish humorists, performing in the millennium. In E. Ercan's words, laughter becomes impossible when you are thinking. This statement

totally goes against the statements uttered by M. Akpınar, who argued, “One who does not think, cannot laugh”. This assumed connection between laughter and critical thinking does not necessarily occur to some of the younger humorists I interviewed. In other words, they look down on any agenda behind the act of making people laugh. They regard this as didactic. They consider this type of humor as “dictating”, “imposing” one’s own point of view.

Volkan Kantoğlu, a down-to-earth and friendly stand-up comedian in his mid 30s, has been actively involved in entertainment industry as a radio show host, humor writer and stand-up since 1996. He defines the role of comedy as follows:

Not everyone who does comedy has political concerns, they might be happy tackling other topics in their comedy. I don’t think stand-up should have any concerns. People come here with the expectation to laugh. They have been listening to others outside with better oratory skills. They are not in need of my advice so I must give them something else.

There is a discontinuity in the narratives between this statement and, for instance, Şevket Altuğ’s earlier emphasis on the “duty and responsibility of an actor to carry society forward”. While in 1970s, art was considered as a tool for the improvement of society; this view is now regarded as almost a dinosaur-like belief from the old days. While it is not within the scope of this study, it is an interesting question to pose whether the earlier generation really believes in such a mission, or they enjoy and find pride in enunciating the motives behind their humor production in that light.

When one reads between the lines in V. Kantoğlu's statement, there is a fatigue of the invasion of politics in our everyday lives and an irony about people talking a lot – possibly insinuating politicians- with “better oratory skills”. A similar view on how “political figures have almost become like pop stars” was expressed by Burak Aksak, a comedy writer in his early 30s, and this is stated to be an alienating factor for younger population.

During the interview, when V. Kantoğlu was asked about the boundaries of humor and which topics are off-limits for him, he said:

You cannot get into politics; it is simply a taboo. I personally don't like getting into politics either. I am a Muslim; therefore I see the right in myself to make some jokes on religion. In my subconscious, I feel that I can do that, as I am a believer. I see the right in myself to joke about Atatürk, as I am a supporter of him as well.

Another 41-year-old stand-up comedian Yüksel Ünal from İzmir interviewed during this research expressed a similar statement on the boundaries of humor he observes in his acts, as well as his perception on the role of humor. In his words:

I don't talk about sensitive topics such as politics and religious beliefs. But I tell a funny story about a friend of mine, who performs namaz while listening to all the talk around him and starts to get involved in conversation immediately after he finishes prayer. It is not making fun of religion per se; even a cleric approved this joke. But I generally do not delve into these topics. People who come to listen to me do not want to hear that. I am not supposed to dictate anyone.

This perception on “what people want to hear/or not”, what is considered as “dictating” or “teaching” form a similar group of narratives among the younger stand-up comedians. Being didactic is abhorred and looked down on. They use similar words to express the type of humor they stay away from: “dictating”, “teaching”, and “advising”. They are all fans of Cem Yılmaz, - most popular stand-up comedian in Turkey currently - and aspire to be like him.

Cem Yılmaz has introduced the sarcastic, distant, cynical and self-deprecating stand-up comedy in Turkey since the 1990s. The individual he talks about in his act is alienated, confused and very representative of an “average Turk”. His stand-up has no concerns to “convey a message” and he almost boastfully acknowledges that. For this reason, he has often been criticized for being apolitical. In an interview on TV8, he argued that “laughter is about what you have in your hard drive and the speed of your processor is key”. While he doesn’t solely regard laughter as a mindless activity based on reflex, he declares that he has a problem with any clichés attached to humor, especially the one about “making people laugh and think at the same time”.⁸

In light of the above discussions, it is clear that the statements defining what “oppositional”, or “political” humor differ among humor creators. However, it is important to note that younger generation of humorists has a more hands-off, distant, and subtle interpretation of humor and its social role. Entertaining and provoking laughter is the most important aim and role of

⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p3z0QbqcA5g> (accessed on 11.06.2015)

humor emerging out of the discourses of mostly the comedians on stage. On the other hand, older generation of humorists has a more clear, almost black and white vision of what political/critical humor is, just like Kandemir Konduk.

Kandemir Konduk, a 70-year-old comedy writer who is famous for his TV series, movies and books on humor, nowadays works with younger generation producing plays that are critical of the ruling party. When I went to interview him, I witnessed a crew of actresses rehearsing a play on women's reaction to the repressive and imposing policies of government on education and reproduction related matters. When asked about what medium he feels the freest in producing humor, K. Konduk answered:

In this age, it is impossible to produce free humor on TV. Both because of repression and also young humorists today do not have such a concern. They have the option to make a lot of money with coarse comedies. It may be possible in theatre under certain conditions. Cinema also regards humor as empty and vulgar laughter. Humor magazines and the books are the freest mediums.

When asked what his sine qua non is for a good comedy text, he said: "Not writing for the single objective of making all segments of the population laugh..."

On the other hand, it is important to clarify the fact that solely belonging to a certain generation does not determine the themes detected within the narratives. A respondent in a similar age range to the younger stand-up comedians mentioned above, presented radically divergent opinions on how

humor functions in our society. Gizem Aldemir is a young theatre actress, who has acted in comedy plays written by Aziz Nesin. Born in 1985, she has studied theatre and acting; and has been working in Ankara Sanat Tiyatrosu (AST) since she graduated. Her ideas on the social role and function of humor very much resonate with the generation born in 1940s and 1950s.

Comedy is only successful and funny when it is done in a serious way. There is also the case of being “comic”, where physical actions are emphasized, almost like a clown. It is empty and takes advantage of the fact that people laugh at physical comedy. Comedy is essentially born from the need to point out to a problem and raise a criticism. It doesn’t have to be political comedy to be able to do that. It doesn’t have to evoke a huge laughter either, it is sufficient as long as it gives you pleasure. But people think, “I paid for this event, you have to make me laugh”.

This idealist emphasis on the need of humor to be critical may derive from the fact that G. Aldemir works in a progressive and left wing theatre company, carrying on a social mission since the 1960s. It is actually an interesting coincidence that Şevket Altuğ said that he put the first bulb in AST in 1963, and now a young actress like G. Aldemir carries on this theatre tradition. Her critique also points out to a new, more professional, and commercialized type of humor. With the rise of capitalism, industrialization and deepening division of labor, just like many other forms of performance art, comedy has also become a commercial activity.

Aldemir’s narrative also resembles M. Akpınar from Devekuşu Kabare and Zihni Göktay from İstanbul Municipality City Theatre, in terms of her differentiation between physical humor and social comedy. M. Akpınar

made a differentiation among different types and levels of humor:

If you look at our humor history, the first level of comedy is making people laugh with action jokes. For instance, you pull the chair just when a man is about to sit down and the man falls down making people laugh. The second level is laughter aroused due to human discharges; such as saliva, mucus, shit, earwax, etc., it is primitive. One level above this is to laugh at disabilities: too tall, too short, hunchback, stutterer, deaf, blind, etc. One level beyond that is laughing at ethnic identity, such as Kurdish, Laz, etc. Today, we have to create a comedy that serves as a slap to anything not psychologically, sociologically and economically in moderation and harmony with the society.

Even though Akpınar claimed that their cabaret theatre focused on the aim of providing an oppositional force against those in power, certain parts of his enunciations indicate a different story. The above-mentioned statement is parallel to the definition of Bergson on the social role of humor. Akpınar assumes a social environment stabilized at certain equilibrium, with an accumulated culture. His understanding of oppositional humor is targeted mostly against the wrongdoings of politicians. He doesn't necessarily question the established value system of the society.

On the contrary, he delineates an ideal type of humor, which performs as a disciplinary force since we laugh at the rigid individuals who cannot adapt, as society requires. Just like H. Bergson argued! In Bergson's theory, society aims to avoid and tame "inelasticity of character, of mind and even of body." This rigidity is not functional in the eyes of the society. Therefore, laughter performs a disciplinary function to discourage inelasticity.

There is a slight difference between Akpınar's interpretation on the role of humor and Bergson's theory. While Akpınar points out to an imaginary, idealized type of society individuals are desired to conform to, Bergson places humor's role in the already existing society with its flaws. This ideal society is depicted in some Deve Kuşu Kabare plays by applying superiority humor, as mentioned earlier in the thesis.

5.1.3. "THE HUMORIST AS PRODUCER"

Given the diversity of discourses on social role of humor by a variety of humorists involved in the production of humor since the 1970s until today, it is also important to seek the traces of changes in theatre culture in the narratives. In order to understand how the production of humor through theatre is affected by political, economic and social climate and how this change is reflected in the narratives, here are some reflections.

The young actress G. Aldemir talked about the vibrant theatre tradition in 1970s – a decade she was not yet born- with yearning. She defined the 1980 coup d'état as a breaking point:

After the coup d'état, 1990s was the period when people pulled themselves together. Theatre was lost in the 2000s and it is not doing well these days. There was not a military coup, but there was a technological coup in the millennium. The humorists also started to shift theatre on to television and they hit the hardest blow on theatre themselves. People started to watch theater on television and they don't feel the need to go and breathe that environment anymore. Only the audience can give its strength back to the theatre.

This statement carries a critique about humorists, when read in light of

Benjamin's discussion on the "author as producer" and how the author positions himself, not solely as a "man of mind", but within the production process to "change the bourgeois apparatus of production". Aldemir questions the rationale behind the transportation of theatre on to television by focusing on the 'necessity of breathing' the theatre environment.

She criticizes the humorists supplying a new and possibly "less revolutionary" production apparatus: television- one of the utmost symbols of mass culture and consumption. This goes against the position of theatre that Benjamin mentions in his article referencing Brecht. He defines Brecht's epic theatre as a theatre that applies and learns from newer means of communication, instead of competing with them. For instance, Brecht uses the technique of montage to interrupt the flow of the scene, which it is inserted into (Benjamin, 1934: 99).

She is proud that AST, despite being a private theatre, keeps its prices low and aims to survive without big commercial concerns. When asked what she thinks of stand-up and its links with traditional practices like Meddah⁹, she argues that today's stand-up ticket prices are "almost like the price of rent" and they attract an audience above a certain level of income.

In this context, it is important to highlight the similarity in the narratives of a comedian, who defines himself as "modern meddah", Mehmet Esen. Born in

⁹ Meddahlık was a Turkish theatre form performed by a single storyteller called a meddah and practiced throughout Turkey and Turkish speaking countries. Through the ages, similar narrative genres have flourished due to interaction among the peoples of Asia, the Caucasus and the Middle East within this wide geographical area. Historically, meddahs were expected to illuminate, educate, and entertain. Performing in caravanserais, markets, coffeehouses, mosques and churches, these storytellers transmitted values and ideas among a predominantly illiterate population. Their social and political criticism regularly provoked lively discussions about contemporary issues. (<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/?RL=00037>, accessed on 20.04.2015)

1958 and starting out as a student of famous actors and comedians Münir Özkul and Erkan Yücel, Esen has initially worked in Devrimci Ankara Sanat Tiyatrosu (DAST)- a theatre group separated from AST by E. Yücel due to ideological differences. Mehmet Esen was put in jail in the aftermath of September 12, 1980 and was tortured for his opinions. In terms of today's theatre and art, he argued that:

In the past, students, teachers, civil servants would come to the theatre. Nowadays these segments of society do not have the luxury of going wherever they want. They can only go and see plays that have cheap tickets. Therefore, my potential audience cannot afford to go out, pay for the commute, eat a meal and watch a theatre play. For the same amount of money, they prefer to buy a week's worth of groceries, stay at home and watch TV.

Both G. Aldemir and Mehmet Esen focus on the role of technology and widespread use of other media, such as television, as well as the changes in shifting income levels and how cultural consumption such as theatre has become a luxury for lower middle classes in the 2000s, compared to earlier decades. The criteria of "opposition" and "being critical" as a social function of humor also come across intensively in Esen's account:

I am bolder on stage compared to real life and do not hesitate to say my word. It is a huge responsibility to be on stage. You say your words based on the tradition you inherited from your masters. I have never regretted this, as I love the person I am on stage and want to make him survive. The young comedians today try to keep their nose clean; they are supported by the system, employed in advertising campaigns, used as the commercial faces of big firms. They are very smart and have things to express but unfortunately hide them inside. Meddah was an artist critical of injustices, an artist who doesn't shy away from sharing his light. He has been the voice

of the people since the beginning. However, stand-up is the voice of the system.

The emphasis on the influence of advertisement industry on cultural production and the necessity of keeping an independent voice is also a concern raised by some of the cartoonists interviewed. Bahadır Baruter defines the humor magazines in that context as follows:

Independence is an issue; humor magazines are nobody's Habertürk channel or Hürriyet newspaper. They are bastards that earn their bread, without any obligations. They are trustworthy, like your closest friend. They are critical and adolescent; and adolescence is an excitement that one looks back on and finds hope, as he/she gets old. These publications represent emotions, like the adventure and joy you experience during adolescence. They are honest; there is no Efes Pilsen advertisement placed in the middle. These clean publications became more impressive as life gets dirtier and old values diminish.

5.1.4. TABOOS OVER TIME

Bahadır Baruter, who was born in 1963 and worked as the editor of L-Manyak and Lombok humor magazines in 1990s, is praised to have created the freest period in the history of humor magazines by cartoonists who have worked with him, namely Memo Tembelçizer and OKY. He was a young editor at the time in his mid 30s and defined the 1990s through the lens of his experience at Lombok and L-Manyak during the interview:

Lombok came up with sexual and teenage humor with a lot of slang and curses twenty years ago. With insolence and an accumulated yearning, we drew the most marginal stuff with a fast pace and it reached an audience. However, the minds of the people that read it are opened up now. The sexual humor we did back then, people

are now consuming everywhere in the social media. This is not a revolution anymore. At that time, a harsh type of humor that tackled taboos was in fashion. Twenty years ago, when people listened to Metallica, we would draw penises in Lombok. Some doors were opened then, now only a political jaggedness could be interesting. There are not many taboos left to be broken. Maybe religion, and it is still as hard as a rock standing in front of us. We draw less of it and in a more careful manner.

This brief overview regarding the shifting taboos in society is an indication of how humorists read the changes in their society. Similarly Memo Tembelçizer, who has also worked in *Leman* and *L-Manyak* around the same time and now a cartoonist in *Uykusuz* magazine, argued that non-conservative, open-minded, free thoughts were expressed most widely in *L-Manyak*. Even though *L-Manyak* had nothing to do with the daily news and politics, they were very political in terms of expressing the unexpressed and drawing the undrawn. This narrative coincides with the understanding of what “political humor” means in a broader context; a definition of politics not only done in the parliament, but which covers the whole social life.

These narratives, when contextualized within the sociopolitical context of the 1990s outlined in Chapter 4, it is evident that the post Cold War climate of downgraded political ideologies coupled with increased emphasis on identity and almost reckless popular culture had its impact on humor production as well.

As an example, *L-Manyak* focused more on personal lives and worldviews and created some anti-heros. Bülent Üstün’s *Kötü Kedi Şerafettin* (Bad Cat Şerafettin) was an evil cat in Cihangir streets, who easily got aggressive and

angry, lost control, a hedonist creature that loved to drink and smoke. Memo Tembelçizer created the character Aşık Memo (Lover Memo) who masturbated. He says:

Our only concern at the time was not to draw any erect penis or direct intercourse. We didn't have any other reservations. When I look at it from today's perspective, the sexual cartoons we could draw in Leman and L-Manyak seem very extreme. Maybe each new generation is critical of the one before. Young people, after our L-Manyak generation, might have been disgusted by our violence, obscenity and repulsiveness. Today's generation has the tendency to express themselves in a milder, less extravagant manner. I feel embarrassed today when I write an Aşık Memo poem. There is an overriding feeling of censorship in society these days. A docility, deference that seems hard to reverse...

This narrative, when contextualized within the discussions on the 2000s in Chapter 4, makes sense. 7 respondents focused on this aspect within their narratives, stating that they feel a rising conservatism in Turkey in the last decade. For instance, Behiç Pek describes this period from an international politics perspective as follows:

Especially in the last years, countries like Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria are at war in the Middle East. Being part of that geography, we feel threatened as well. The West does not perceive us to be one of them, so the society holds on to its values, becomes more conservative and tries to protect itself. Religion is one of these values; we cannot say it's right or wrong, but we can try to understand it.

B. Baruter on the other hand defines the variables behind this trend focusing on domestic dynamics as follows:

Turkey is changing with the removal of so-called military tutelage, weakening opposition, Kemalism becoming easily pecked at, and the religious circles relaxing and feeling freer in the social sphere as they get economically and culturally stronger. I personally don't like this change. But on the other hand, the population's mind is opening up; learning to look at events from a different angle. It feels like a country going through puberty, unhappy and conflicted. Manic depressive, with multiple identities, even schizophrenic, a crazy young one at the age of 13-15. He bangs the door and leaves. When he was a kid, he was a repressed and more closed-minded society. Now there is a flamboyancy also reflected in humor. However, when humor operates on marginal territory, it is pushed back. I have always condemned timidities like this in magazines, such as "let's not touch Fethullah supporters, they control the police and judiciary. They could ruin your financial structure by giving fines, etc."

There are many layers in this statement about what was within the limits of being 'acceptable' or not, and what constituted topics of self-censorship depending on the time period the humorist is defining. There is a floating sense of pseudo freedom with hints of increasing authoritarianism in the background. While the taboos regarding Kemalism and military are being lifted, there are new taboos and fears replacing them. In this context, while most respondents, such as Baruter in this study argued that humor is inherently –by nature- critical of the system and should not be timid, there are also views raised about how conservative humor can get at times. For instance, Behiç Ak, the editorial cartoonist of Cumhuriyet newspaper warned against that conservative side of humor in our interview:

Humor contains an irony and criticism; you cannot draw a cartoon to praise someone. If you do that, it would be the subject of a cartoon

itself. However, folk humor at times criticizes the “exceptions”, not the “rule”. It is not meaningful to sanctify humor, as it could be very conservative at times. Real humor is when you look out of the box and criticize the absurdity of a rule. For instance, when women first started driving in the 1950s, the cartoonists were drawing the accidents women were involved in. This is a conservative stance; should women not drive? Thus, humor can be very sexist and racist, and it has been so in Turkey. Therefore, I argue that humor should be based on intelligence, not morality.

This tendency of humor to reaffirm the already existing division lines in society and conforming to the authorities’ demands is expressed also by M. Tembelçizer. He defined these days as times of “cultural desertification” similar to the repression experienced in the aftermath of 1980 coup d’état. He described 1990s as a period of relative revival, only to be faced with the threat of repression and elimination of balance and control mechanisms on the ruling power in 2000s.

5.1.5. SELF-CENSORSHIP

This discussion brings us to the issue of self-censorship, which was touched upon during the interviews. There was a divergence of opinion in terms of periods of time covered in this study. There were humorists, who argued that repression and censorship was a constant in Turkey even though the forms it may have taken changed. For instance Behiç Pek argued:

Political repression is a constant, we had it in the past and we have it now. Whoever comes to power, cannot handle criticism. If the laws are not sufficient, they pass new laws to exert more pressure. Journalists and cartoonists struggle with that all their lives. That is inevitable.

Similar to B. Pek, Umur Bugay argued that:

Nothing has changed since the 1980s in terms of censorship. In the 1980s, people from Ministry of Education, police, military or secret service would gather, watch our movies and apply censorship. You needed to conform to their orders to get permission for broadcast. Political works were never tolerated well. Every society has taboos; however today dogmatism is more influential. In our youth, you could make fun of bigotry more easily.

B. Baruter and M. Tembelçizer argued that cartoonists became more timid and docile in the recent period. Baruter recites the case of his cartoon in which a group of men is depicted as performing namaz in a mosque. One of them is talking on his cellphone asking God for permission in order to leave namaz earlier as he has other things to do. In the background, there is a phrase on one of the columns of the mosque in Turkish in the midst of all Arabic scribble: "There is no God, religion is a lie".



Figure 4. Bahadır Baruter's cartoon. 2011

In the aftermath of this controversial cartoon's publication in Penguen magazine in 2011, he received a number of life threats, even including "don't send your child to school". In his words, "it is so disturbing that you have to leave the country if you have a child". But these threats did not prevent him from expressing his views and (non) beliefs through humor. While he contends that there are certain boundaries (making fun of disabilities is one of them), expressing that you are an atheist is not one of those.

In this context, while discussing the boundaries and taboos within humor production, some interviewees, such as Memo Tembelçizer and Onur Ünlü made a distinction between "conscience and common sense" vs. "censorship imposed by authorities". While they define the first as a personal choice and disposition, the latter is enunciated to have its roots in a fear of being reprimanded with monetary fines or court cases by political authorities. In M. Tembelçizer's words:

In common sense, one consults his conscience. The only valid decision-making is the one where you consult your conscience. If I can handle a sexual cartoon, there are certainly other people in this society that can handle it as well. I can't be that unique individual. The magazine sales depend on the number of people who share a similar mindset and feeling. So if there is a response in society, what is the ground for prohibiting it? "Behaving against the morals of society" is only a pretext. If there is a law restricting certain freedoms of expression, then it is a law specifically designed to have the authority to restrict certain freedoms of expression. It is perfectly possible not to disturb society by using your individual conscience. Censorship is annihilating mediums of expressions for the interests of a group.

This statement differentiates between what is acceptable by the society and the restriction attempts by political authorities. This separation between conscience to judge the boundaries of common sense and arbitrary restrictions and censorship imposed by authorities formed an important element of the narratives regarding the social role of humor. There was not a single humorist interviewed, who admitted to applying self-censorship (while one can occasionally detect signs of it in their narratives). Especially the older generation is very sensitive about this issue. 72-year-old theatre actor and director Müjdat Gezen stated:

There is nothing as dangerous as self-censorship. I have never used that mechanism in my life. That's why I spent three years of my life in prison. It is good not to curse, insult or humiliate, but self-censorship means censoring yourself and it is very dangerous.

Similar to Müjdat Gezen, Metin Akpınar also argued that humorists need to abstain from self-censorship, as it is a violation of one of the basic human rights:

As long as you know how to say it, you can say anything. Freedom of expression is the second right after the right to life. Limiting yourself due to fear causes a lot of harm. It shouldn't be confused with hurting someone's feelings; because it is a fundamental human right. If you are put on trial for expressing your opinions and if there is an independent judiciary, it will definitely forgive you (with a cynical gaze).

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, M. Akpınar is one of the representatives of a generation, which lived through the repressive political climate of post 1980s coup d'état. I have cited in the beginning of this section, examples of how they survived through political pressure, and

censorship of the martial rule by playing backgammon and giving eggplant recipes on stage. The fact that Akpınar acts so nonchalant and politically correct about how freedom of expression ‘should’ work in practice is somehow contradictory with the real life examples given by him. It reflects that we do not live in a theoretically perfect world, where humor ‘should’ always be a tool of freedom of expression and should not be curbed by authorities.

Burak Aksak provides a recent pertinent example of how humor production is a constant struggle with the constraining demands of authorities. Aksak is a young humor writer praised for his popular comedy TV series *Leyla and Mecnun*. He and his crew, and also suffered from the RTÜK (Radio Television Supreme Council) censorship efforts during the airing of the show on the government TV channel (TRT):

We drink, smoke and curse in real life, but you can’t do those on television. That creates a weird artificiality. Then you start thinking about alternatives. So can censorship be beneficial? Of course, it is not a good thing but otherwise that creativity might not come out. It is also more effective on the audience who catches that. They do not constitute the majority of the population, but they are a beautiful minority that understands you.

Onur Ünlü, who was the director of TV series *Leyla and Mecnun* written by B. Aksak, is a 42-year-old man with scruffy hair and beard, looking rough on the outside but articulates a deep understanding on humor and society as the conversation develops. He tells an anecdote on the censorship they faced with TRT during the broadcasting of their show:

Let me tell you the story of wine for instance. It was one of the earlier episodes. İsmail Abi and Mecnun are in front of Erdal Bakkal and they are suffering from love pain, so they have to get drunk and cry. That is how the scene is written. We had grapes at lunch that day and during this same week the prime minister had said, “Don’t drink wine but eat grapes instead”. I said, “Bring grapes” and they got drunk eating grapes. So that happened spontaneously at the movie set. That man needs to get drunk so we find a way through humor.

The fact that it is not expressed directly does not inhibit the audience from understanding the hidden meaning behind that scene. In Onur Ünlü’s words:

This makes the prohibitive mindset even dumber, which is the fun side of it. You look at the guy in the eye and drink your wine. You only call it a different name and the stupid guy feels even more stupid. This is what gives pleasure to the audience and us. The prohibition makes us seem smarter and cooler than we actually are. But actually no, he is stupid.



Figure 5. Filming the Leyla and Mecnun TV series in Istanbul 2012. Courtesy of Leyla and Mecnun.

5. 2. HUMOR AS A WITTY DEFENSE

A chubby, funny looking penguin is throwing a bouquet of daisies- not rocks, as one would usually expect. The penguin is a protestor and his face is covered with a blue handkerchief. It is based on the demonstrator in British street artist Banksy's "Rage, Flower Thrower"¹⁰ mural. From Cairo to Kiev to Hong Kong, post 2008 global economic crisis years have witnessed protests across the world supported by street art / graffiti and cutting-edge cartooning as creative means to subvert hegemonic political expression. In 2013, Turkey witnessed such protests. The flower-throwing penguin, drawn by one of Turkey's leading cartoonists, Selçuk Erdem, quickly became one of the images defining visual memories surrounding the June 2013, Gezi Park protests in İstanbul, Turkey.



Figure 6. Banksy "Rage, Flower Thrower"

¹⁰ <http://www.stencilrevolution.com/banksy-art-prints/rage-the-flower-thrower/>, accessed on 13.04.2015

Selçuk Erdem, who is a 42-year-old calm and reserved man with curly greyish hair, works as one of the editors of the cartoon magazine “Penguen”. In the busy Penguen office, he defines his work modestly as follows:

I adapted Banksy’s “flower thrower” figure as a penguin in the magazine. People liked it a lot. It spoke to a feeling in people: *responding in a witty manner, instead of throwing a rock*. It became part of the Gezi spirit. When you can visualize people’s feelings, they say, “That’s it!” Our name also coincided with the “penguin media”, which ignored events showing documentaries on penguins during Gezi Park protests. I don’t think we had a great impact but we probably created another color in people’s minds.

The “penguin media” mentioned by S. Erdem in this interview refers to an active censorship that occurred in the aftermath of the Gezi Park protests. Despite the intensity of the demonstrations in İstanbul’s Taksim square and the harsh response of the riot police with tear gas, very few Turkish news channels and leading newspapers covered the events objectively and transparently. The specific example Erdem refers to was CNN Türk TV channel broadcasting a documentary on penguins as the protests escalated. This obliviousness of the media occurred despite the fact that the predominantly youthful Gezi Park protests¹¹ was Turkey’s largest social upheaval in decades. This further increased the sense of injustice and anger among the resentful populations. Humor became a powerful way of expression to counter this sense of anger, almost providing a sense of relief through revenge.

In the fieldwork leading up to this PhD dissertation, each of humorists

¹¹ 63.6% of whom were 19-30 years of age according to the #direngeziparkı survey report, conducted by Esra Ercan Bilgiç and Zehra Kafkash of İstanbul Bilgi University (2013).

interviewed had distinct interpretations on the social role and function of humor in Turkish society at present. A strong theme emerging from the fieldwork and to be analyzed in this chapter is defined by keywords, such as *“expression of feelings and thoughts in a witty manner”, “a tool for dealing with violent assaults and defending oneself.”*

Out of 48 respondents interviewed face to face, 17 described one of the main functions of humor in Turkish society as *“expression of feelings and thoughts in a witty manner”*. Other subthemes that emerged under this title are *“humor as a safety valve”, “the exaltation and relief that someone finally voiced my concerns”,* almost a feeling of *“revenge”*. On the other hand, 6 respondents defined the mission of humor as *“a tool for dealing with violent assaults and defending oneself”*. These statements and the themes engrained in them were related to each other given the specific time and place they were uttered.



Figure 7. Selçuk Erdem at the Penguén Office, November 2013, Istanbul. Photo by M. Eğılmezler.

The Gezi protest, an amazing showcase for this specific role of humor with a variety of witty street art and graffiti, was primarily focused on 'right to the city' and quality-of-life issues. It started out specifically in opposition to a government/real estate development collusion to develop Istanbul's Taksim Gezi Park. Utilizing advances in communications technology and social media platforms, the more connected youth felt better equipped to criticize the government. As a source of inspiration for their humorous, dissident discourse, they also relied upon Turkey's independent, political cartoon magazines.

Selçuk Erdem and many other cartoonists expressed an increasing interest in the humor magazines they work in, especially during times of intense political repression, such as Gezi Park protests, and post-coup d'état political environments. Erdem argued:

When an event like Gezi happens, people look at us more. We can see that in the sales figures. The sales increased during Gezi and then turned to average figures in the aftermath. There were lots of events happening, but people can see a trace of it neither in televisions nor in newspapers. There is a serious repression. While the demonstrators used humor themselves, they also turn to cartoon magazines, as they *need humorists to express what they feel*. Maybe, that's also why the sales of *Gırgır* increased in the aftermath of 1980 coup d'état.

Those days when *Gırgır* was so popular and almost like a "life station" for the masses was described by Tuncay Akgün - the creator of the legendary figure Bezgin Bekir- who started working for *Gırgır* in the early 1980s. He spoke of the magazine as the venue for "popularization of humor". *Gırgır*

had an emancipatory mission in the early 1970s right in the aftermath of '68 movement. Leading up to the 1980 coup d'état, Akgün describes the scene as "a civil war with a serious hint of fascism, including provocations, mass shootings in coffeehouses, where the country was being dragged into a military coup." In Tuncay Akgün's words:

Friday was the day of Girgır. We would run to the newspaper stands in the morning to buy it. In this dark period, it was a life station, an island of joy and energy. It transformed people and created a space of tolerance and moral space. I was really disappointed when the magazine was closed down in 1981, after the 1980 coup d'état and right after I started working there. It was as if I reached my dream and then it was taken away from me.

In this narrative there are a number of themes that come together, including *humor creating a space consisting of a shared community* (theme 4), as well as *increasing tolerance* (theme 4) and *humor giving strength, hope and a sense of carrying on* (theme 3). Girgır magazine that "first popularized humor", appealed to masses, and created a unique humor magazine culture deserves a brief life story shared below.

5.2.1. THE TRADITION OF HUMOR MAGAZINES IN TURKEY

Girgır became an independent humor magazine in 1973, disconnecting from Gün newspaper. It became a legend and the highest selling humor magazine in 1978 with 300,000 sales figures. Because of its criticism of the military regime, it was banned in 1981, and sales figures rose to half a million. Girgır became the third best-selling humor magazine in the world, following Mad in the US and Krokodil in the Soviet Union.

One major change brought about by the *Girgır* tradition is the high amount of copyright being paid to the young cartoonists as a result of the country-wide distribution network, lower production costs and increased sales. These developments attracted a high number of young cartoonists to this profession. *Girgır* was the representative of a unique humor magazine tradition of creating its own cartoonists from its pool of readers. This tradition, to some extent, still continues in the current humor magazines that were formed by cartoonists and humor writers, who originated in *Girgır* School.

Girgır managed to create a local sense of humor from the streets by being inclusive of population at large. Instead of the abstract and graphic European influenced, Steinberg-style editorial cartoons, *Girgır* brought a fresh and authentic breath to Turkish humor. *Girgır* represented a humor tradition reflecting the transformation of the society in the 1960s and 1970s with the increasing immigration from rural countryside to the big cities. It focused on the dynamics of ordinary man stuck in between employer-employee relations, in slums and the cultural conflict of village vs. city.

The main character depicted in the yellow pages of *Girgır* is an ordinary, low-middle class public figure, not-too-powerful but smart, struggling with economic difficulties. This character generally represents the unemployed masses, civil servants, and small shop owners. Often times a man, this figure corresponds to Kemal Sunal (and Yılmaz Güney on a more political plane) in cinema. *Girgır*'s humor and characters were based in a neighborhood world, an imagined space of family, community, and solidarity (Şimşek, 2014: 76).

Behiç Pek, who has started his career working in *Gırgır*, praises the magazine for opening its doors to all talented youth. *Gırgır* brought together people regardless of class, wealth or political views. He defined the 1970s as a time when there was more commonality and uniformity in people's lives as there was only one television channel and one humor magazine. Behiç Pek stated:

Once a week, a Turkish movie would be shown on TV and the next day, humor writer İsmet Çelik would write a funny commentary on it. As everyone had already watched that movie, they would open *Gırgır* to read that commentary.

In that context, humor magazines had a different mission of speaking to a wider population and their sales were much higher, as well. When he compares *Gırgır* to later humor magazines, Pek argued that:

An older man would read *Gırgır*; a child, who didn't know how to read, would ask her mother to help read it, the professors in universities would read it to their students. We aimed to come up with an average humor to reach a wide audience. Now, the audience of humor magazines is limited to high educated, middle class or students. An older gentleman or a shopkeeper may not understand the jokes in it. This is the risk of behaving so free.

The sociopolitical changes since the late 1970s triggered a shift in the audience of the humor magazines, which is also reflected in the style and language of humor. As mentioned in the historical background chapter, 1980s post-coup d'état social climate was impacted by the neo-liberal economic policies and the rising values of consumerism and individualism. New dreams were manufactured while the prime minister at the time,

Turgut Özal discreetly threatened people of “going back to the dark days of 12 September”, as well as not being able to “get rich and consume” (Kozanoğlu, 2000: 17). This fear culture served to discourage especially left-wing political activists from being involved in politics.

When asked to make a comparison between the 1980s and today’s humor; especially in the context of individual freedom issues vs. social conflicts, Behiç Pek’s answer is cynical:

Today, labor unions, associations and parties are not as strong as before. In fact, back then people had mechanisms, such as strong labor unions, where they could raise their voices. Now those spaces are diminishing. No one can really raise their voices and tell their problems. Those so-called individual freedoms don’t really mean much.

This statement on the diminishing importance of social organizations and mechanisms to increase social equality and solidarity points to the increasing prominence of neo-liberal paradigm as well as loss of hope in left-wing policies in the aftermath of the 1980 coup d’état. In this period, the state moved further away from a social welfare state and became an unhealthy clientelist distributor of its resources. Class relations turned in favor of the capital owners and workers as a class were put in a more disadvantageous position within society (Boratav, 2005: 42-43).

While class solidarity was discouraged, free market economy and individualism was promoted. Lack of value systems or mechanisms to ensure social justice and social responsibility created a “liberated” yet

socially irresponsible “individual”. The increasing urbanization, lack of similar social networks in the big city, the cultural clashes between the different segments of the population also contributed to the creation of this silent, depoliticized and insensitive individual, who feared to speak up in the face of social injustices.

The account of Tuncay Akgün from *Leman* - a 53 year-old veteran of various magazines, including *Girgir* and *Limon* and the creator of legendary *Bezgin Bekir* comic hero - describes 1990s as the decade of “rising values” in the world, as well as Turkey. This is also the decade when *Leman* emerged as an independent humor magazine with a crew departing from *Limon*. Akgün argued that *Leman* tried to deconstruct the “big lie”, which alluded to a world without poverty, “full of beautiful, handsome, sterile, hygienic characters.” He defines *Leman* as dealing with the lower elements of this ideological apparatus, including torture, human rights, unresolved murders, and the deep state.

That was a time when the media was transformed completely. Oligarchical structures supported by big financial corporations and banks, operating from luxurious plazas appeared. A new type of journalist, who manipulated the news in line with the interests of the newspaper owners, emerged. *Leman* was very effective with its “anti-media” pages and its covers.

The spread of color TV sets and introduction of the larger population with the mass media in the 1980s and 1990s produced new tastes, standards and expectations in society. The emerging middle class had aspirations to lead a “good life”, including modern life amenities, such as refrigerators, washing

machines, a house, a car, etc. However the laissez faire economy that incorporated privatization and deregulation policies were far from benefiting the lower and middle classes. These policies increased the poverty of working classes, hit the small and mid-size entrepreneurs, and created disappointment for the ones hoping to get a “good life” (Çarkoğlu & Kalaycıoğlu, 2009: 19).

The developments in private television and broadcasting also influenced the practice of journalism and the layout of newspapers. In order to keep up with the competition on advertisement and get their share from the thriving market of the 1980s, the major daily newspapers resorted to a tabloid format, squeezing the more serious news in between the front and back pages. They increased the pages dedicated to entertainment and sports and offered newspaper supplements, such as encyclopedias, kitchen utensils, in return for collecting daily “coupons”. The newspaper industry changed dramatically. The respected press families withdrew from the field and the publishing industry moved from the traditional Bâb-ı Âli to the outskirts of the city, İkitelli. (Öncü, 2012: 126)

Newspapers such as Yeni Yüzyıl and Radikal came out with the claim of representing the urban, well-educated, liberal, secular intellectuals in mid 1990s. They defined the boundaries of “cool”, including new fashion styles, gentrified eating and drinking spots in the city. A new type of apolitical, sarcastic columnist, non-hesitant to share his/her private life and tastes, appeared in the plazas of İkitelli, very different than the traditional journalist of Bâb-ı Âli. Newspapers were owned by large conglomerates housed in big

plazas, as opposed to good old journalists on the street mingling with people. (Şimşek, 2014: 64)

Behiç Ak, who is an editorial cartoonist in Cumhuriyet, one of the oldest and most reputable newspapers in Turkey, critically defines certain aspects of social change as follows:

The individual became lonelier, being left without a milieu (ortam), environment. He goes to work, comes back home. The milieu has solely turned into a digital medium. For instance, architects do not have a place to gather and mingle anymore. I call this monoculture. During September 12, 1980, I knew that I had friends to see if I stopped by at Papirüs or Ziya Bar. Now there is no such space.

5.2.2. FROM SYMBOLISM TO WIT

Socially and culturally, the demolition of the sense of “us” and its replacement with a lonelier “me” led to the dissolution of old neighborhood culture and environment. The shifting life styles resulted in the disappearance or changing form of the familiar “social types” used in humor. The folk culture characters, such as Karagöz, Nasreddin Hoca and Keloğlan, extending to Kemal Sunal in the movies, had found their representation in the first most popular cartoon magazine of the 1970s. Gırgır’s good-hearted neighborhood characters, such as avanak (idiot), beter, utanmaz (shameless), deli (mad), etc. were examples. These characters, representing the larger community values, such as compassion, solidarity and belonging, slowly faded away as a new urban/mass culture emerged in late 1980s and 1990s. Rougher, individualistic and cynical characters of the new city, representing the “me” identity, replaced them.

The capital accumulation in the media sector, and the emergence of a white collar new middle class led to the publication of new magazines appealing to a more specific, defined audience, such as women, men, youth, business professionals, etc. (Gürbilek, 2001). According to A. Şimşek, these magazines also facilitated the formation of the new middle class discourse that “ironically distanced and differentiated” itself from the traditional middle classes (Şimşek, 2014: 48).

The new highly educated middle class audience had a desire to feel “superior” by differentiating themselves from other classes of the society. Examples of superiority humor, such as representations of “maganda” and “zonta” (uneducated and unsophisticated immigrants in big cities) are frequently used in the humor magazines of 1980s and 1990s, including Limon and Leman. Making the low, subaltern classes the target of its humor as the “other” helped to define the boundaries of middle classes’ own existence.

The new middle class of the 1990s will be able to say everything the traditional middle class and the lower classes “know” but do not “say” through this new media. Therefore, they develop a “genuine yet ironic” style. They even make fun of their own habits at times through parody; yet do not abstain from underlining their deserved status and wealth due to their good education and profession. Their liquid identity is an amalgam of various habitus and does not belong to a specific class. (Şimşek, 2014: 70) In this context, one of the defining features of 1990s humor is the prominence of

this new, ironic middle class sense of humor.

Selçuk Erdem, who has been drawing cartoons since he was at middle school in late 1980s, reflects on how societal changes affected this unique tradition of dissent through cartoon magazines in Turkey. He has worked in Limon, an alternative, bohemian humor magazine active in early 1990s, as well as a short-lived yet lively effort, Deli magazine. The successor of Limon is named Leman, whose clear political stance and often-blunt political criticism created unease among some of its cartoonists, including S. Erdem. He and a few other cartoonists, including Bahadır Baruter, Metin Üstündağ and Erdil Yaşaroğlu launched a new magazine in 2002, namely Penguen, which presented pertinent examples of the above-mentioned ironic middle class sense of humor.

When asked what they did different in Penguen compared to Leman, Erdil Yaşaroğlu, a cheerful, friendly cartoonist in his early 40s, defines their transition from Leman to Penguen as “a return to comic”. “Leman became very didactic at the end. But the sales were going well. So, instead of changing the route of the transatlantic, we decided to build a small boat and see how it goes.” Explaining their difference in approach, he gives an example: “Selçuk (Erdem) and I were doing the covers, “What will you do, draw sheep on the cover, haha?!” people would ask. Yes we did and criticized the government with that, and it was great.”

The style of humor in Penguen is softer and more indirect compared to earlier magazines, such as Leman and Limon. They are at times being

criticized as being childish by the ones who prefer a harsher type of political humor. However, a less didactic, funnier style based on witty outthinking has attained more success in appealing to a younger, well-educated, urban middle class audience in the millennium, who mostly seem to be the new consumers of humor magazines. Their motives for buying the magazines as well as what they laugh at, changed as explained above.

This brings us back to the earlier discussion on the use of witty sarcasm in order to respond to violent assaults. The “average humor” used in *Girgır*, as mentioned by Behiç Pek did not abstain from using easily understandable formulas and symbols to reach its readers. However, magazines such as *Penguen* in 2000s aim to attract a different audience, “highly educated, middle class or students” as articulated by Pek.

In this context, Selçuk Erdem defines the language they use at *Penguen* as a “language that aims to understand life through the lens of humor”. He further goes on to say that:

We give little credit to stereotypes, clichés and aim to produce a humor free from political slogans. The black and white stereotypical images of a businessman or a bigot are now far behind. There used to be the image of a poor civil servant escaping from the fruit seller with an empty string bag (boş file), struggling at the end of each month. They would draw the even poorer worker, who always wears overalls (iş tulumu). The student caricature used to carry a backpack and a t-square. Now we are using a more realistic style, thinking in a more nuanced, sophisticated way. Those simple representations don’t really work at this age, such as the depiction of dark and evil figures behind every event.

In these statements, there is an underlying tone of “respect for the intelligence of the audience.” By not drawing a CIA agent dressed in a topcoat, wearing dark sunglasses, they refuse to take the easy way out of finding jokes through well-recognized symbols. The argument that the simple representations ceased to appeal to the young audiences and they sought a new language of humor may be read as a reflection of a break in the episteme.

Continuity in the discourse is observed in the observations of Tuncay Akgün, who actually traces back the difference in the symbols used by humorists to an earlier period, the days of *Gırgır*. Akgün emphasized that the style of humor drastically changed in *Gırgır* to respond to the transformation in society. The political figures, businessmen, as well as the common men were drawn much more realistically. While the rich businessmen were portrayed as “fat compradors smoking cigars” in earlier humor magazines, in *Gırgır* they were depicted with their real names and accents, such as Koç and Sabancı.

While political figures used to be represented in the past as abstract persons in dress-suits sitting in parliament, *Gırgır* cartoonists were inspired by the vivacity of real-life politicians. Demirel was speaking from the yellow pages of *Gırgır* in a thick Isparta accent and Ecevit’s bony face, in a virtuoso genuineness, would be tackling the American embargo of 1974. Tuncay Akgün defines the social role of humor as follows:

Humor feeds from fear and paranoia. Through humor, you confront and heal social fears and paranoia. It is also in humor’s nature to stand

by the weak. Humor exposes and reveals the weaknesses and loneliness of the powerful. It deconstructs everything sanctified not just in the political sphere, but also in other social relationships.

The emphasis in this discourse on concepts tackled under theme 1, such as “siding with the underdog”, “protecting the weak” are merged with a fearless and smart deconstruction of the myth of power. In this sense, without literally saying it, it insinuates the “wit” (theme 2) and incongruous humor behind the ability to decipher the façade. However, there is still a hint of didacticism and a sharp distinction between the “weak” and the “powerful”, which is not as commonly uttered by a younger generation of cartoonists like Selçuk Erdem. If we look at S. Erdem’s remarks on their efforts to be less didactic and wittier, this slight shift in the discourse becomes apparent:

We tried to develop a tone in the magazine that abstains from being self-righteous and patronizing. It is not a tone pretending to know and teach everything, but rather trying to understand and find the meaning through the humor we make. We try to come up with as witty jokes as we can. Every individual wants to express his/her emotions; but this can be difficult at times. The feeling one has with good writers, “I have had this feeling before, but you expressed it so well!” also applies to cartoonists. We materialize abstract feelings such as “anger” and “worry”. It attracts more attention when we can make the reader go “Hah! That’s it!”

This social role and function of “being a witty response against violent assaults” attributed to humor also resonates with the younger generation, born in mid-1980s and work in diverse areas, such as cartoon magazines, social media and radio. Cem Dinlenmiş draws the third page of Penguen magazine, inspired by the daily political events. His drawings occupy half a

page and called “Herşey Olur”, which means “Anything Happens”. He is 30 years old and his individual voice comes across in his work, which he collects and turns into books designed in the form of graphic almanacs, including dates and monthly notes about events that are actual references about the drawings.¹²

Glancing through the window in his small apartment and workspace in Cihangir, he defines all art, including cartoons and humor, as a form of expression. In his words:

One does not necessarily try and do something beautiful. Whatever you have in your soul comes out. It could be ugly, beautiful, you may want to curse, you may as well be very angry. When I think of how I first responded with humor in high school, I would draw an authoritarian teacher I didn’t like much. I would show that to my friends. I didn’t do that in order to make money as a cartoonist. I felt like drawing that person, it’s funny, people like it, there is a mutual energy. When it comes down to the society level, it could be correlated with the function of *dealing with threats directed at you*. As I have a sarcastic personality, that’s how I have always perceived it. I felt that it is a beautiful, poetic way of doing that.

During Gezi protests, the streets were filled with examples of such humor. The protesters were exposed to intense tear gas and faced water cannon, but they were still laughing all the way to Gezi Park, the symbolic centre of the demonstrations. In a photograph from the protests, four young men and women are seen sitting by the tents in the park with two banners that read: “Love the way you gaz!” and “Just in Biber”. There was another graffiti that said “Yeter artık ya, polis çağrıcım”, meaning “That’s enough, I am gonna

¹² <http://www.cemdinlenmis.com/> (accessed on 15.4.2015)

call the police”. Another fun example of disputing the government’s plans on Taksim square was “Taksimiy yayalaştırdık, sana gerek kalmadı” (We have already pedestrianized Taksim, there is no need for you”).



Figure 8. Gezi Park, Istanbul, June 2013. www.buzzfeed.com

In order to devalue the arguments of the protestors, the Prime Minister at the time Recep Tayyip Erdoğan frequently used a stigmatizing language. He went as far as calling the protestors as “çapulcu”, which means a group of bandits and looters who enter the enemy land for the purpose of stealing and pillage. After the events, Turkish Language Authority even changed the name of the word “çapulcu” in the official Turkish dictionary to mean someone who “behaves against the order” just to reaffirm what Erdoğan claimed to mean. However the protestors, in a stylish culture-jamming

maneuver, reappropriated this term. Using the American electro-pop music band LMFAO's song, "Everyday I'm Shuffling!" they started their own chants and even made a video called "Everyday I'm chapulling!"¹³



Figure 9. Taksim Square, Istanbul, June 2013. www.halkizbiz.com

Cem Dinlenmiş's reaction to the street humor in Gezi reflected the dilemma a humorist faces questioning the value and mission of his work in the face of such a grand and exciting social movement. When asked to compare the humor in the magazine and the street art, as well as their connection; he smiled with a twinkle in his eyes:

¹³ <https://vimeo.com/67931380>, accessed on 12.06.2015

Theirs was more spontaneous, brave and free. As we generally work on representations, we draw a man that writes on the wall. They are the actual man writing on the wall. When it's really intelligent and dynamic, we noticed that our work might become non-functional. On the other hand, humor magazines are a published, widespread tradition. They have not lost their value in terms of social good, as we are professionally involved in and have a solid grasp of this field. It served as a source of motivation for people. Initially, I had a panic about what to draw, dreamt of going to Taksim to draw something huge. When I talked to Selçuk Erdem, he said, "more people would see what we do here in the magazine."

In these quotations, one feels that Dinlenmiş refers to themselves as the cartoonists and the man writing on the wall in Gezi Park as essentially the "same". The audience who consumes the humor produced by the cartoon magazines has now become the creators themselves. This points out the fact that using a similar vein of witty language to express themselves creates a common bond and community among the humorists and their audiences. This is how theme 2 is connected with theme 4. Using this witty language also makes them feel superior compared to the politicians, who are only capable of using the language of violence and repression (superiority theory).

A humor writer, Vedat Özdemiroğlu, aged 47, working in Uykusuz, a relatively recent humor magazine being published since 2007, defined use of humor during the protests as "people published a big magazine in Gezi". He added:

The second day of the protests, on June 1st, the walls were covered with jokes from both the protestors and the magazines- their slogans were better! It was almost as if our meetings until dawn was carried

out to the street. It was a great experience. Practice went beyond theory. For years, I have stayed up until next morning in the magazines on İstiklal Street. On June 1st, 2013, the whole İstiklal street has become a humor magazine.

Meetings of cartoonists until dawn the day before the humor magazine comes out, is a tradition that still continues today in magazines such as Penguen and Uykusuz. Uykusuz literally means “sleepless”. Almost all the cartoonists interviewed talk about those meetings as special and intimate gatherings. They were not willing to let a researcher observe one of these gatherings, which offer intense insider debates. The actual intimate discussions take place at this level before it is filtered through the lens of the editors and the magazine comes out.

Kemal Kenan Ergen, a humor writer who has worked at several humor magazines over the years and afterwards has written comedy movie scripts, defines the work environment in magazines as below:

We used to work in one room, all of us. That was the system, initiated by Oğuz Aral in Girgır. We had to come to the magazine office certain days of the week and stay awake the whole night. Because there were very few women writers and we were 25 men, it was mostly a fun men’s chitchat.

In my research, I came across some diverging views regarding the existence of organic links between the witty street humor produced during Gezi and the legacy of the humor magazine culture in Turkey. Among the humorists interviewed for this study, 14 expressed views on this issue. While the majority of them argued that there was an inherent link between the two,

humor writers such as Ergen argued otherwise. In his words;

At this point, humor became everyone's *personal weapon*. Everyone is a humor writer. The humor of people, who are free enough to be culturally engaged individuals, overcame the humor in magazines. Those are the ones that even have more fun at their homes than cartoonist have during magazine meetings until dawn. The humor magazines only constitute 10% of what young generation perceives to be humor these days.

On the other hand, there are cartoonists, such as Tuncay Akgün, who argue that this is a tradition that is carried forward by different generations in various forms:

Leman used to represent in the 1990s, what the social media represents today. Think of it like a revolt conducted with a real revolutionary spirit, based on conscience. I felt grateful when Gezi events happened, because our story finally culminated somewhere. This gave us such a relief. It happened right at a time when we almost felt defeated and our hopes were broken. I think we have a share in that ferment. Maybe these kids are not aware of it, but this is an example of a leap forward. It is almost a genetic transfer from their older brothers, sisters, mothers, and fathers.

One of Leman magazine's humor writers is Atilla Atalay, who has been an active contributor and a well-liked humor writer in the world of humor magazines, since 1978. He said:

Despite the fact that I have been doing this work for ages, I still laugh at certain jokes produced during Gezi, or dialogues on Twitter. They were certainly full of quick wit, didn't have the aim of insulting. I don't believe that such a generation came out of the blue. At least they read our magazines and were part of a certain interaction.

When he was defining the social role of humor, he added:

Instead of smooth, easy times, these types of social events provide a more fertile soil for humor. The main duty of the humorist is to forget his/her grudge and mock in a joyous way. The only thing the authorities cannot do is to be that joyous. If we get tough, they will get tougher. Instead, as people spreading humor out on the streets, or professional humorists in magazines, it would be more rewarding to use the craft of witty language to express oneself with a simple touch.

This non-violent and peaceful way of expressing oneself through humor was also underlined by Erdil Yaşaroğlu, the Penguen cartoonist. In his comments on Gezi protests, he defined humor's social function as "society's safety valve", without which it would explode. In his words:

The humor in Gezi is something that the authorities need to be grateful for. Those young people expressed their reactions in that manner, without resorting to violence. The ones that resorted to violence belonged to an older mentality and order. The young ones expressed themselves through humor. This was a culture molded over the years both by the humor magazines and the Internet.

The humor that spread through social media and Internet has been very influential in the last decade. A protagonist of the humorist discourse over Internet has been the founder of Zaytung, Hakan Bilginer. Zaytung is a satirical online newspaper mocking daily news, taking after Onion in the USA. Zeitung means "newspaper" in German and they use the Turkish pronunciation of this word as their name. Hakan is a 37-year-old electricity engineer, who initiated Zaytung because he was bored at his job working for a big company as a system engineer. He defines the mission of Zaytung as "revenge":

As a website that uses sarcasm and irony, Zaytung is fed by the feeling of anger. When something disturbs and angers you, you take your revenge by displaying how absurd or stupid that thing is. Basically it is this motivation. The readers also get angry but cannot express it accurately. You appreciate it when someone expresses it for you and you feel relieved. Zaytung gives the reader the sense that they are not lonely and there are other people who think alike and see the absurdity of events.

Zaytung uses the benefit of social media, which is much faster in its response as well as its capacity for dissemination/reaching audiences. It also utilizes the advantage of incorporating readers' contributions and feedback in their content. The more classical mediums, such as the cartoon magazines, newspaper, radio and television have difficulty in keeping up with the pace of social media and its humor. By keeping themselves anonymous, Zaytung crew also evades negative reactions. Bilginer, in a complacent manner, said:

Zaytung is a medium that frequently receives reactions in social media, but it is similar to fighting against the windmills. None of them are lasting. No one remembers it or is affected by it the next day, including us. We laugh at it because we are behind the Mount Qaf; none of them reaches us. We personally also dislike being around and popular. Being anonymous gives us some elbowroom.

This statement can be interpreted as a salute to the British street artist Banksy- the inspiration behind the "Gezi penguin"- whose real identity is hidden from public. One of Banksy's works criticizes the use of closed circuit public surveillance cameras, which are becoming more prevalent around the world. "What Are You Looking At" by Banksy depicts a security camera viewing a wall that has the words "what are you looking at?" on it. The

words seem to echo the sentiments of those feeling uneasy about being watched constantly. Just like the popular and widespread use of Guy Fawkes masks, symbolizing the online hacktivist group Anonymous, during the Gezi Park protests, as well as the Occupy movement, and many other anti-government and anti-establishment protests around the world.

5.3. HUMOR AS THERAPY, HOPE AND SURVIVAL

Kakılmış, a middle-aged covered woman, who is being regularly beaten by her lazy drinker husband, decides to do something extraordinary one evening. She takes a sip from his whisky in the kitchen just before she brings it out to her husband. She doesn't like its taste initially and makes a sour face. But the feeling of tipsiness and air headedness grows on her eventually. In the meantime a neighbor comes to borrow some sugar. In the kitchen, half-drunk, she puts whisky on top of sugar accidentally. After noticing it, she starts laughing like crazy. When the neighbor asks whether she is feeling fine, she says: "I feel a little dizzy, but I have never felt this good in my life!" Although her husband gets angry and attempts to beat her again, she keeps on singing a song and is not fazed at all. She even reformulates the lyrics of a love song into "my dear killer", laughing along.

Kakılmış was one of the characters in the famous comedy TV series, *İnce İnce Yasemin* broadcasted on TV in the 1990s. Yasemin Yalçın, a 55 year-old actress who played the role of Kakılmış, seems to be both a funny and sad character, and intensely so. She even called herself half-jokingly manic-depressive during the interview. She likes to be defined not solely as a comedian, but a complete actress capable of performing a variety of roles.

Melancholy is my closest friend. I also think comedy derives from that source. Tragedies focused on the aristocracies of the time, so there were not many comic elements in it. On the other hand, comedy is the story of real lives. If there is a drama, there is comedy as well. Otherwise how could you create comedy from the story of a woman subjected to domestic violence every day? It is actually not that easy to turn a woman walking around with purple marks on her face into a comedy character.



Figure 10. Yasemin Yalçın in the 1990s TV series *İnce İnce Yasemince*. Screenshot from Kanal D.

In the above statements, there is an inevitable interdependency between comedy and drama. There is even the understanding that comedy finds its source in tragedy. Instead of expressing oneself by delving deep into

melancholy, comedians and cartoonists choose to create funny circumstances. Thus, comedy creates a sense of hope and heals wounds. It is no coincidence that these enunciations are made by one of the most “funny” comedians in Turkey- a society accustomed to suffering from constant pain and drama. Out of 48 respondents that participated in this study, 15 stated that humor served as *an anti-depressant & a therapy mechanism* in Turkish society. On a similar note, 9 interviewees argued that humor gave *strength, hope and a sense of carrying on* by creating *a breath of fresh air, a new way of looking at things*.

The structure of the society and the way it functions inevitably affects the content and forms of humor, as well as humor creators’ possible narratives of what their work means in the larger context. Bahadır Baruter, a 42 year-old cartoonist and artist, defines the society during our interview, which shed light on why humor functions the way it does very succinctly:

It doesn’t make sense for the individuals of this country to desire democracy as a regime without having it in their daily lives. There is no democracy in families or education system. 99% of Turkey’s population is beaten up first in their family, then on the street, and then at school. There is a system where the strong oppresses the weak. Children grow up in a family environment where the father is patriarchal; the mother is a chatterbox; and the child is naughty, being brought up with a shitty life ethics. The rules of work life are very cruel and capitalism does not function as noble and elegant as it does in Europe. Even as an anti-capitalist, I can acknowledge that they have a more mature and healthy capitalism.

After enunciating his reflections on the economic, social and family relations prevailing in Turkey and the challenges people deal in their daily lives, he

set out to place humor within this background. Certain interplay of conditions and relations makes the appearance of certain narratives possible. In the following statement, Baruter continues to explain why humor serves the function of “an anti-depressant” in this society:

Just because we refine these difficult social conditions through humor, our magazines serve as anti-depressants and sell high. There is a dirty world out there and we cleanse it through the lens of humor. This creates a therapy environment in which people can confront their realities. It is an awful country on one hand; it will never become Sweden. However, it is wonderful on the other hand, thank God it won't become Sweden!

Baruter's words imply that for humor to be vibrant and edgy, there needs to be difficult and rough conditions. Otherwise, in his words “all you can get is cartoons taking place on a deserted island in the European or American tradition”. He sneers at the tradition of middle-class family humor, like the style of humor produced by MAD magazine founded in 1952 in the US. In his view, Western societies do not provide substantial content for humor construction. Baruter argues that only Latin America has a similar cartoon magazine culture to Turkey. He reasons it by saying that it is also a “miserable place dealing with tons of taboos like us”.

This narrative actually resonates with the first theme, i.e. the social function of humor to be critical and break taboos. If we analyze the narratives of humorists on the social function of humor, there is a correlation between these two themes. They may even have a relationship of reciprocal determination as Turkey being a “miserable place dealing with tons of taboos” also implies that humor has the potential of being used as a tool of

therapy, almost an anti-depressant.

5.3.1. COMEDIC CATHARSIS

This understanding of humor finding “its edge” in the dramas of daily life- tragedy and comedy going hand in hand- dates back to Greek mythology. In ancient Greece, comedy was used to discuss significant issues, such as deities, rulers, war, and peace. Theaters served as forums for civic engagement where “problems were debated, corruption was uncovered, and injustices were corrected” (Jenkins, 1984: 10).

A cartoonist in Leman, Güneri İçoğlu, who is well versed in Greek mythology, is also interviewed in the scope of this research. He has a cartoon character called “Gönül Adamı”. This character is a combination of tragedy and comedy. He is usually depicted in İstanbul by the Bosphorus, feeding simit (sesame bread) to seagulls, with a tear in his eye. Observing the degeneration of his beloved city, he chats with his French friend, Jean Pierre. He carries an “old Istanbul gentleman soul”, longing for long-gone values. He doesn’t make you laugh but brings a bitter smile to your face. İçoğlu says this character in itself was a joke since it was published in a humor magazine although none of his jokes were funny. He argued that:

The essence of tragedy is catharsis- cleansing the soul from its passions by subjecting it to pain. Aristo talks about catharsis in Poetics. The essence of comedy is to hold a mirror to our humane flaws. It reminds us that we are nothing in this universe and we need to have more self-reflection. Its main quality is to support the oppressed and downtrodden. However, the millennium humor has lost its essence. Humor is not solely entertainment; it needs to make people cry, especially the ones with a deeper understanding. Only

fools can separate tragedy from humor. The reason why there was comedy in Gezi is due to the high volume of tragedy.

In the statements of G. İçoğlu, one can trace the relationship between different themes, especially the social role of humor as criticism (not solely entertainment) and humor as a source of therapy. These two narratives also intersect with the fourth theme of humor serving as a mirror to personal flaws (self-deprecating humor). G. İçoğlu links the amazing humor that emerged out of Gezi protests to the “high volume of tragedy” accompanying it. B. Baruter, on the other hand, depicts why it happened in this specific setting- Taksim, İstanbul- and not in any other:

Gezi protests came out of Istanbul, just like the Van Lake monster. Humor magazines are also produced in Taksim, which is the energy center of Turkey. The cosmopolitan energy of Istanbul in the midst of east and west, north and south, Islam and Christianity and the whole schizoid richness contributes to dark, dirty, heavy stuff to be refined and turned into humor. The result is at times confusion, at times entertaining diversity, or at times depressive feelings. A unique social event like Gezi could have only happened in a place like İstanbul.

The feeling that this “unique social event”, Gezi uprising created -especially invigorated by the humorous discourse that emerged out of it- was “hope”, “a breathing space” for most respondents. There is an undeniable compatibility between the social role of humor as an anti-depressant and the feeling of hope and strength generated by it. For instance, Atilla Atalay, a humor writer, who currently works in Leman magazine, expressed the following thoughts:

You feel hope knowing that there are people who think like you. I

especially get optimistic if I understand that they are young. There is always hope where there is laughter. It is much more crucial today, they can fight with anything but they can't fight with you when you are making a joke. There is hope when there is humor, especially when it is spread to the bottom.

Atalay, who is a humor writer born in 1963, is a member of the generation called as "seventy-eight and a half" by Tanıl Bora. Bora defines this generation born between 1962 and 1965 as a transgeneration (ara kuşak) in Turkish history divided by September 12, 1980. This is the generation, who have been outside of the pre-September 12 political networks, yet endured the atmosphere of deep political polarization, diminishing hopes and increasing fears. They were not socialized at a time of "clean hopes, dreams and ideals" as their older brothers and sisters belonging to 1978 generation. However, they were still attracted by this zeitgeist and fell in love with the "honor of being dedicated". They still carried the excitement of not conforming to the authorities' demands (Bora, 2010: 39).

In this context, rereading the statements of Atalay, one can establish some correlations between different themes within his account: For instance, the emphasis on "hope" (theme 3) is accompanied by the "*sense of community created by humor*" (theme 4) and fighting back with humor, using humor as "*a tool for dealing with violent assaults and defending oneself*" (theme 2). A social uprising like Gezi creates a sense of hope as it reminds of those clean ideals of solidarity, dedication and resistance. Instead of roughly interpreting humor as a "*didactic force critical of the ruling governments*" and "*in the service of improving society*" (theme 1), this view focuses more on its binding force within the society, creating a softer culture of empathy and community. This

generation stands closer to the younger generation and understands their concerns and fears. They abstain from placing themselves at a higher plane and harshly criticizing the millennium youth as being “apolitical”. They try to understand through the language of humor, as expressed by Selçuk Erdem (in theme 2).

In this context, Selçuk Erdem, besides defining humor as an “*expression of feelings and thoughts in a witty manner*” (theme 2), also described humor as a source of *hope to fight melancholy* (theme 3):

Humor is a balancing force. You may feel lonely and it is a heavy, sad feeling. If you try to handle it with humor, there emerges the melancholy of centuries old clichés such as a man walking in the midst of autumn leaves in the rain. In the balancing effect of humor, there is both the rain and the leaves while the comic aspect brings hope and being able to laugh at oneself. The same thing applies to politics. We can draw politicians horrendously at times but even that is a cartoon at the end of the day. If you express it through writing an article, it could be very dark and hopeless. But a cartoon drawn even at a very dark day gives hope.

In this statement there is an acknowledgement that humor is an alternative means of dealing with daily or political melancholy and challenges. It is an unruly and mischievous manner of addressing the trials and tribulations of life. Instead of using the mainstream methods of reciprocating, humorists choose to bring a fresh and possibly more humane perspective through laughter.

Mehmet Esen, who is a 57-year-old theatre actor representing the meddah tradition up until today on stage, uttered the following words:

Humor arises out of pain. When you interpret that pain truthfully by humor, you can also heal the wound. Otherwise people can lose their minds by seeing all this madness. Humor is a potent force in relieving these wounds. It simply makes us more humane. A person with a sense of humor views the world through a more conscientious eye.

After these statements on humor being *a tool for healing wounds* (theme 3), he also added comments that focused on the second theme of humor being *a force/weapon for dealing with violent assaults and defending oneself* (theme 2). Humor helps you to keep sane in the midst of all the chaos and madness. But it goes beyond that according to M. Esen. It gives people *hope and strength to fight back*. It is an influential communications tool and a potential change agent. It just doesn't make the status quo bearable by providing a pain killer and anti-depressant but rather is influential in changing people's point of view and broaden their horizons. This view coincides with the statements of humorists, who value *humor as a source of opposition* (theme 1). In M. Esen's words:

I also see humor as a very important weapon. Cabarets shook the foundations of Hitler fascism. Humor tells us that the night can be very dark but the sun can rise afterwards. The youth developed an amazing sense of humor during Gezi. Humor and tolerance is a part of our culture since Hoca Nasreddin- if we can keep that tradition alive, our problems will be solved. A politician can talk for ten hours and not change a person but you can change people's lives with a theatre play, you can open a new window.

This emphasis on humor serving as a stimulant for change by broadening horizons and giving hope is not commonplace among the younger generation as outlined in the chapter on Theme 1. They are more cynical

about humor or art having the potential to really change their lives. What it can do most is to make life more fun and bearable. For instance, a 30-year-old scriptwriter, Burak Aksak expresses this sentiment in the following statements for his recent film, *Bana Masal Anlatma* (Don't Tell Me Fairy Tales):

I shot this movie in my childhood neighborhood. I believe we need to do that, as those neighborhoods won't survive in the future. We will only be able to see it in the movies and television. We can't do anything about it but at least we enjoyed it while it lasted, we made a movie there, we laughed and cried during that process.

In these statements, there is more of a compliance and docility. While there is an inherent bitterness in his words, these bitter feelings are expressed in a more subtle style of humor, reminding us of the beauty of those old values and times, yet not at all a call for rebellion to fight against the unfair urban restructuring plans in order. When asked whether the cultural climate of the millennium has affected the emergence of his humor style, B. Aksak stated that:

People that we have never met in our lives make some decisions that affect our lives. They have certain political programs to design a life style and you grow up in that environment. I have never voted in my life. I am not interested at all in daily politics. I am so sick of turning on the TV and seeing the politicians all the time. In the past, they would have a few political news, a debate program a week and we would go back to our daily lives. Now the political figures have become almost like pop stars. We used to have pop stars like Tarkan, but not anymore. Politicians have become icons and we only talk about their statements. This is so annoying to me.

This narrative reflects the prevailing mood in the Turkish psyche especially in the second half of the 2000s. As mentioned in the chapter on “Humor as a Source of Opposition, Rebellion, and Freedom of Expression”, the generation born in the 1980s does not express a connection between political criticism and humor. On the contrary, they regard having any such agenda behind humor as didactic. They are the ones who actually consider this type of humor as “dictating”, “imposing” one’s own point of view. Some of them, like Burak Aksak express their belief in a more raw, organic style of humor originating from the streets and people, as opposed to having political humor of television comedies such as “Olacak O Kadar”¹⁴.

In this period everyone is alienated around the world and receives their share from injustice. So humor is much more widespread to the people on the street and daily life. Humor of people, who do not try hard to make jokes, is even funnier. They are so funny but they are not even aware of it. When you enter into a store, you may witness the shopkeeper making jokes based on such subtle cross-references that you don’t need TV anymore. For instance, do we still need comedies such as Olacak O Kadar on TV? Not really, because humor has grown tremendously on social media and the streets.

Humorists’ narratives are shaped by historical context and realities. For instance the above-mentioned comedy TV series, Olacak O Kadar began to be aired on the state television channel, TRT on 1986 and was most popular in the first decade that it was aired. It was also the time (1993-1994) when political satire shows such as Plastip Şov (skits made with the puppets of politicians) were on demand. Erdil Yaşaroğlu, who is the writer of Plastip

¹⁴ Olacak O Kadar was a popular political comedy show especially in the 1990s on television. It started to be aired on TRT in 1986 and continued until 2005. It consisted of 5-7 minute long skits mocking the tragicomic political and daily events.

Şov compares that period to today:

I prepared television programs for a while and there was not as much pressure as today. We did *Plastip Şov* on TRT; it was a political humor show with silicon puppets. TRT had a supervision board but most things would pass. We would make fun of the prime minister, president, opposition parties, everyone. Can you imagine that today? Impossible. There were very unique leaders at the time, such as Yıldırım Akbulut, Tansu Çiller, Mesut Yılmaz, Süleyman Demirel, Turgut Özal... Even children would imitate them, but today there is no impersonation. There are still characters but the system does not allow this.

In this narrative, one can detect some of the issues tackled under theme 1 such as *humor as opposition* and *self-censorship*. In a system where the more official channels of expressing opposition are limited, humor is often used in its most witty and raw forms on the street and social media. The witty and raw forms of humor transported onto TV, such as episodes of *Leyla* and *Mecnun* written by Burak Aksak often uses double meanings, euphemisms and symbols (grapes for wine). In this way, they make themselves understood by a limited audience, which is not alarming to the authorities but at the same time ridicules them (see discussion in Chapter 4.1 on self-censorship). This narrative forms a part of the network of statements on the social role and function of humor, linking to the role of humor in *establishing a communal, shared cultural space* (theme 4).

While some view the current production and role of humor through the replacement of more traditional and closed channels of expression with freer social media and street humor, there are other humorists who interpret the change in a different light. Met-Üst defines humor as one of the reasons to

tolerate life:

You live and you die. Art is a way of making this period more meaningful. Humorist argues that this effort for meaning is futile; we will die at the end of the day. It is much more honest and childish. We don't use humor as foreigners do. We use it as an antidote, a tool for endurance and bearing hardships. For instance, a father beats up his spoilt kid and tears are rolling down from kid's eyes but he stands across from him and says, "it didn't hurt, it didn't hurt!" That's humor for us. We know that in reality it hurt so much... But we say it didn't and tell a joke about Kenan Evren or Yıldırım Akbulut. We don't know how to get rid of them, so we tell a joke. Today, we can't even come up with a joke; maybe we became catatonic, unable to feel these days. Still, you can't lose hope and humor is the most basic food of hope.

There is a convergence of narratives among humorists interviewed that focus on the potential of humor to provide an outlet for anger and frustration during times of hardship, thus providing an antidote/pain killer, and at the same time expressing hope for a better future. Some of them raise their anger and frustration with the hope that humor will be the catalyst for change by leading people to question the status quo and the injustices they witness daily. On the other hand, there are others where this narrative on expression through humor centers on the social role of humor as anti-depressant, therapy and antidote. It remains to be a question whether the consumption of this "anti-depressant" makes the person feel stronger to struggle for change or just has a numbing effect making it easier to conform to the status quo.

5.4. HUMOR AS SELF-REFLECTION, COMMUNICATION & COMMUNITY

Sitting in a small side street café off of busy Alsancak neighborhood of İzmir,

stand-up comedian Yüksel Ünal recites the following ancient story:

Years ago, there was a judge in Shiraz, who was blind in one eye. A man came up to him and said: "I have a complaint about my neighbor. He tells me the truth all the time." The judge responds: "Well, who doesn't want a neighbor who tells the truth all the time? Send me the man, I want to meet him." The man goes to his neighbor and tells him that the judge wants to see him. The neighbor knocks on the door of the judge. As soon as the door opens and he enters, his first words are: "Selamünaleyküm blind judge!" The judge thinks, "Indeed this is a little too much truth to handle!"

Ünal told this story to emphasize the point that humor needs to be self-deprecating and everyone is better suited to make fun of his or her own flaws. In his words: "suffering is closed circuit." Especially in stand-up comedy, the person on stage often uses self-deprecating humor to make the audiences feel in a more equal relationship with the comedian. Jay Sankey, an American stand-up comedian, who wrote on the intricacies of the craft, defines two of the most crucial properties of a stand-up comedian as being sympathetic and vulnerable (Sankey, 1998). All the interviewed stand-up comedians in this study agreed this observation to be accurate.

Overall, the feature of humor to be self-deprecating and retrospective (*the theme of self-reflection through humor*) was raised by 8 of the respondents. This theme formed a unity of statements with themes, such as *humor being a tool for increasing social communication and tolerance* (8 respondents); as well as *humor facilitating the formation of a community through a strong fellow-feeling and common binding language among its audience* (12 respondents).

Humor can have both uniting and divisive effects within and between communicating parties. Humor used in a self-deprecating manner is regarded to be more “genuine” by most of the respondents. Self-deprecating humor has the tendency to strengthen the commonality and shared meaning perceived between communicators as opposed to superiority humor. In other words, it leads to more “identification” as opposed to “differentiation”, contributing to group cohesiveness and deeper relationships (Meyer, 2000: 318).¹⁵

One of the respondents that tackled the theme of self-deprecation was the crew of Modern Sabahlar, Radio METU (Radyo ODTÜ) morning show that has been on air since 1998. They have built a very strong bond with their audiences who are being witnesses to a process going on for the last seventeen years. They improvise on the show; they feel a sense of responsibility and are conscientious about the shared community i.e. the “club” they have created. In terms of humor being self reflective, Oktay Demirci stated the following:

One of the most famous stand-up comedians in the US is Aziz Ansari. He is actually really funny. He is Iranian American, so he makes fun of that group and himself, which is more sincere. In our geography, what scores points is standing on one side and making fun of the other side. I think that making a joke about the side you are on is funnier. You make fun of yourself and it is complete personal freedom.

Other interviewees, including Selçuk Erdem, Bora Seçkin, and Onur Ünlü, all

¹⁵ Identification, clarification, enforcement, and differentiation are regarded among humor’s four key communication functions in John C. Meyer’s article: “Humor as a Double-Edged Sword: Four Functions of Humor in Communication”.

coming from very different disciplines and practices of humor, have also articulated variations on this theme. In this sense, there is some regularity that exists within narratives regarding the type of humor (self reflective vs. raw mockery) and its function within the social. Here is what Selçuk Erdem expressed when he was asked to enunciate his main principle about humor:

Everyone should make fun of himself or herself. Otherwise it could be really vulgar and wrong. For instance, blacks in America can make fun of themselves, but if others do, it could be racism. Similarly, a Jewish or a gay comedian can make self-deprecating humor and we can laugh at that. If everyone uses himself or herself as a comic material, there would be no problems.

Placing this principle of humor within the Turkish sociopolitical context, it is important to dig into S. Erdem's explanation on the depths of Turkish psyche regarding humor:

There is a fear in our country when it comes to humor. The other day I was chatting with other cartoonists in Penguén about the fact that sometimes a US president or a politician plays in a skit making fun of himself. Here, these things are regarded as disturbing the order, as if the glue that holds us together is seriousness and it can all fall apart by a simple joke. When we were kids, there used to be ceremonies at school. If there is a big silence around, you cannot hold it in and laugh almost reflexively. They think it disrupts the order, but it doesn't really, nothing happens. Making fun of oneself is not degrading, it is actually dignifying. When you see someone who is so relaxed, you respect him or her more but it doesn't exist much in Turkey. That's why there is no tolerance for humor.

In this narrative, there is a convergence between the themes of *humor used as a tool for increasing social communication and tolerance* and the theme of *self-*

reflection through humor. However, it could be questioned whether the community formed among the ones using humor as a self-reflection mechanism also serves as an exclusionary mechanism against those who have not yet reached that “level of maturity”. Humor being a double-edged sword may lead to group identification on one hand, while it differentiates between the group and the ones excluded from the group on the other hand. Therefore, it is ambiguous whether it increases tolerance and social cohesion or vice versa.

5.4.1. NARRATIVES ON TOLERANCE AND COMMUNICATION

One of the themes that emerged from the interviews on the social role of humor is enhancing tolerance and communication in society. In the narratives of some of the humorists, such as Tuncay Akgün, one can detect the social role of humor, shifting and changing, almost delineating the breaking points at different time periods regarding this theme. For instance, Akgün’s narrative loads the humor magazines with an idealized mission of surviving through difficult rupture points and breaking certain taboos in society (convergence with theme 1):

Humor has the function of raising the bar of tolerance and leniency in society. We are successful to the extent that we teach tolerance to people. The state of “appearing strong” is glorified in this society. We need to get rid of our heavy baggage in order to feel lighter. Humor magazines have been highly influential in breaking certain taboos and transforming society in Turkey. I have lived through “neighborhood pressure” since the 1970s and 1980s when it was an issue for people to even hold hands on the street. I got into trouble for having long hair. Unfortunately today we are still talking about girls hanging out with boys.

In this narrative, one of the social roles of humor is defined to be “raising the threshold of tolerance and understanding in society.” Similar to S. Erdem, T. Akgün defines the rules of formation in a social setting where “appearing strong” is sanctified and making fun of oneself is regarded as weakness. Given such a backdrop, humor acts as a potent tool for easing communication and bringing down walls. By subjecting the “powerful” to humor and uncovering their weaknesses, it serves as an equalizer within society.

There are certain difficulties for humorists to serve that function in such a society. Memo Tembelçizer outlines these factors more in detail during our interview. He brings a perspective on the shifts in mindsets over the years. These explanations actually coincide with some of the discussions outlined under the chapter on theme 1 focusing on *humor as a source of opposition and freedom of expression*. In Memo Tembelçizer’s words:

It was a taboo to talk about the polarization between the Turks and the Kurds in the past. Today it is possible to express opinions on that issue more freely. In terms of the coverage of humor, we used to have the ethnic figures in Karagöz. Today when you want to tell a Laz joke, there are men who could object to it saying, “are you humiliating our Black Sea citizens?” Everybody is scared of being imposed something. A social setting where no one speaks up and everyone tries to impose himself or herself as a power center is not a free environment. It is an environment where fascism is shared. In our culture everyone represses his or her negative thoughts about the other, the problem grows bigger and communication only occurs in the form of fights.

This narrative has similarities to the perceptions of Ece Ercan in Chapter 4.1, regarding the touchiness and lack of tolerance that prevails within the

mindset, which defines the possibility of certain narratives (what is made a topic of humor or not and how young humorists avoid politics as a topic altogether). Another statement on the lack of communication and willingness to understand each other was expressed by an older cartoonist, Behiç Pek. He contextualized the social role of humor within a culture, which is used to a rollercoaster of conflict and clashes:

As far as I have witnessed since my childhood, conflict does not solve any issues. It escalates step by step; people start killing each other, that's how it has always happened. It is crucial not to get to that point. That was the pre- September 12 climate. It calms down for a while, then that violence and tension rises again. When that happens, you have to start all over again.

His solution to avoid this trap of violence and tension also makes references to the social role of humor, which he defines within the larger context of social communication and interrelationships:

You can only reach a solution when people listen to each other. This applies to all spheres of life, ranging from a political debate program to a cartoon. You are showing a cartoon but if the man says, "I don't care, and I won't look at it"; there is no point of it. You have to convince people first. If he looks at it willingly, by his own consent, then he can see something in it. All relationships in society need to be that way. Humor constitutes a part of that.

Communication is a key factor in nearly all theories of humor because of its resulting from a message or interaction perceived by someone. It requires a voluntary participation of the side of the recipient/audience in order for the message to invoke a response in the form of laughter. Humor is defined as a cognitive experience that requires an internal redefining of sociocultural

reality (Apte, 1985). Without being open to that interaction and experience, that carefree state of mind, of which laughter is a possible external display, will hardly come about.

5.4.2. HUMOR'S CONNECTION TO TRUTH

For a human being to be ready to accept and take in a message that might lead to an “internal redefining of one’s sociocultural reality”, a certain level of openness and personal development is necessary. When talking to Bora Seçkin, a theatre director and actor in ‘City Theatre’ –Istanbul Municipal Theatre, on the nature of comedy, as well as the relationship it produces between the performer and the audience, he stated:

Humor is demolishing one’s own mind. It’s not easy. Shirley MacLaine once said: “a person who knows how to laugh at oneself will never cease to be amused.” It is incredible how strong you get, because you demolish yourself before anyone else and show that you are open to criticism. In comedy, individuals are innocent. It is similar to looking eye-to-eye, very personal. Criticizing with laughter doesn’t hurt much, thus comedy is painless. It gives the remedy at the moment of laughter; you don’t have to think about it at home, like you do after tragedies. There is a relationship of poison and antidote in comedy.

This narrative on the nature of comedy actually resonates with the theme 3, which focuses on the *role of humor as a therapy mechanism*. Humor acting as an instantaneous healer also applies to the cases where one is ready to look at oneself in the mirror and self-reflectively evaluate oneself. This type of maturity and preparedness for comedy is not too easy to come across according to B. Seçkin:

In our repertoires there is generally foreign comedies as strong comedies are rare to find here. It takes courage to find that individual matter and for it to represent everyone. It has to be both personal and the thoughts and feelings represented have to interest everyone. The foundation to base the comedy needs to be appropriate, the individual has to be mature enough and ready for comedy. It is possible to establish communication through comedy only with that kind of personality.

This more individual and self-reflective characteristic of humor has certain similarities to other narratives expressed within this research, which will be outlined in the following pages. They penetrate through different mediums and genres of humor producers; having ramifications on the social role and function of humor. One focuses on the essential qualities of the individuals who produce and receive humor, while the other domain looks at the larger context of society- again comprised of those very individuals- and how humor functions within that context. Therefore, these narratives are inevitably interdependent on one another. The structure and agency dilemma becomes visible in this context.

Onur Ünlü, being the director of one of the most popular comedy series between 2011-2013, defines the essence of humor and the indispensable qualities to be found in a person who has a sense of humor in the quotation below:

Humor and irony has a strong connection to truth. Truth brings a smile to your face. It also creates a feeling of alienation. If you experience enlightenment on a certain matter, you feel alienated from the situation you are in and that brings about laughter. Once you become aware of it and learn how to use that door of perception, you may be closer to truth and humor. That sort of irony exists in the

Eskimo and Chinese poetry, as well as Yunus Emre's poetry. That process is a reflection of your inner relationship with your "self" and "ego". The main conflict is between the ego and the heart. A person needs to be aware of the source of their actions, whether it is the ego or the heart. One needs to be constantly alert and aware about that distinction, which leads to a sense of humor. Wise men are not grumpy as people usually think; on the contrary they are witty and alert men.

After elaborating on this quite personal and internal description of humor's nature, Ünlü also focuses on its social role and functioning within the society. The emphasis on genuineness and truthfulness in the emergence of humor at a very personal level is now transported in his words to the plane of relationships between the creator of the cultural product and its receiver:

If the audience believes in the character, they are willing to everywhere with that character. Anyone can write a story, but not create a character. In our TV series, they loved the characters; saw themselves, their brother, and their dumb friends in those characters. This was the result of us wanting to connect with truth. The heart of the audience gathered it. The audience wants to feel safe, they are certain that we won't let them down.

In this narrative, the emphasis on the "connection to the truth", "heart vs. ego" dilemma is a continuation of the themes Ünlü outlines on a personal level, as well. In this context, he foresees a relationship of trust, which builds a shared community and culture among the humorists and their audience. Therefore a convergence is observed among themes of self-awareness, seeking of truth and community formation. In Ünlü's words, there is no distinction between them as producers of humor and their audience:

After the Gezi protests, TRT blamed us for writing the slogans and organizing the protests. They suspended our show. We are not influencing those masses: they are actually us. We say a joke, and afterwards they come up with a joke that we didn't think of.

The existence of a seamless bond between the artists and the masses is a narrative that reflects the theme of *humor facilitating the formation of a community through a strong fellow feeling and common binding language among its audience* (theme 4). This theme has been repeatedly enunciated by many respondents, especially the cartoonists, who see themselves as the representatives of Turkey's unique cartoon magazine tradition since Gırgır in 1970s. In their narrations, cartoon magazines have served as both a school for young and talented folks aspiring to be cartoonists and a fun, creative work environment.

Recognizing other people are thinking and feeling the same way as we are creates a source of humorous pleasure. This theme is also related on a deeper level to the theme of humor as an "*expression of feelings and thoughts in a witty manner*" (theme 2). In this sense, cartoon magazines have created a shared community of followers, an audience who have embraced them as friends or even comrades, with a mix of emotions, including admiration and solidarity... In the narratives of two cartoonists, this relationship is depicted along similar concepts and themes. Bahadır Baruter argued that they actually have a deliberate strategy to create this common culture and community feeling:

The ones who work at the humor magazines and the consumers of it are essentially the same people. They have the same kind of

intelligence and sensitivities. They are united at a common perspective where one creates and the others understand it and laugh. This is a large audience exceeding the actual sale figures, as let's say, five people read one magazine. It moves from hand to hand, there is no staple binding it so that people can share its papers while reading. We value that as a strategy. There is no such agenda to make it difficult to share so that it sells more. On the contrary, we would love it to be shared; as a result a culture is formed. It is important for us that this culture creates a common appeal of sharing at the university campuses, classes, dorms, etc.

5.4.3. INDIVIDUALISM AND TECHNOLOGY

This emphasis on *humor facilitating the formation of a community through a strong fellow-feeling and common binding language among its audience* (theme 4) is actually presented as a conscious and purposeful strategy adopted by humor magazines, which seek to create their audience base. In this narrative there is no reference to “consumers” of these magazines in a commercial sense. They are rather presented as a community united with a common perspective, conscientiousness, and wittiness. However, the unity and strong bonds among this community is perceived to be disrupted by new developments in technology and social media in the millennium by some respondents, such as Selçuk Erdem:

When we were drawing in the 1990s, we were only addressing our magazine's readers. It is a situation where you mutually accept each other. At times when you draw nonsense or disturbing stuff, your reader either likes it or tolerates it for other sections in the magazine they like. You at least know that you have readers who will tolerate. With the advances of the Internet, we now involuntarily reach people who are not our actual readers. For instance, we share our cover on Twitter or Facebook. The special contract you have with your readers

does not apply to those people who see your cover on the Internet and

react to it.

Besides this acknowledgement about the changing terms of cultural and humor production as well as the communications technology and dissemination tools, there is still a convergence of statements among the cartoonists about the cartoon magazine being the source/origin of a shared community culture. This shared culture is deemed to be communicating and creating a common binding language with the audience. Kemal Kenan Ergen, one of the humor writers interviewed, likened the youth's schmooze at home that was carried out to the street during the Gezi protests to the chit chats the nights before cartoon magazine comes out. As an exception to the convergence of the discourse, he actually argued that the exchanges at home were much more fun than the professional magazine hangouts.

This narratives regarding the individualization of humor permeates through interviews especially conducted with the cartoonists. Most of them, having lived through the cartoon magazine culture initiated by Girgır, have the opportunity to compare and contrast different periods retrospectively. While one cannot argue that the episteme has changed, there is a radical difference in the dissemination and sharing of humor with the advancements in communications technologies. While some value the communal magazine culture, others put more emphasis on the merits of individualization of humor. One of the repercussions is the ease of delivering a finished product, i.e. the cartoons for a weekly magazine through less traditional means, such as the Internet. In Kutlukhan Perker's words:

In magazines and newspapers, the columnists and cartoonists do not

go to the office anymore, they send what they have written. Even twice a week is deemed to be frequent. With this system providing more freedom for the cartoonists, the quality and the sales went down. When I first started out in mid 1980s in Firt, I was 17 and the head of the magazine Tekin Aral was 50- we were working together and those people with that background and age were very influential on us. The cartoon magazines were not independent at the time; they were part of the newspapers and physically in the same building. One would feel himself more as part of the media. Now it is on one floor, just like an advertisement agency. It is physically part of the media but we don't feel that spiritually. I am 41 years old drawing all these years, yet it always keeps me hungry and fresh to spend time with my colleagues at the magazine.

As mentioned above, the narratives on this issue diverge into two main groups. Kutlukhan Perker's narrative reflects the sentiments of a group of earlier cartoonists, who find value in these independent humor magazines serving as a community and a school for young artists. Being part of that holistic media culture creates a strong fellow feeling. On the other hand, the respondents who value more individualistic and independent viewpoints complain that the magazine cartoonists eventually become quasi civil servants and lose their excitement (Kemal Kenan Ergen interview). In another younger cartoonist's, Cem Dinlenmiş's words:

In the 1970s tradition of humor; you go into the magazine at the age of 17-18 and you learn how to draw and be part of that system, which works like a factory. Today everyone has a very individual worldview and a young cartoonist is expected to have that view when they first join the magazine crew. They may improve drawing techniques but they are supposed to have a life stance, be endowed and competent to work at the magazine.

This narrative actually converges with the changing language of humor as

mentioned under theme 2. The cartoonists, who have already developed a personal style and language, are equipped to create a more unique and creative style. This goes against the more top-down, hierarchical relationship at *Gırgır*, where the editor and founder of the magazine Oğuz Aral had the control and say over all humor production at the end of the day. In today's *Penguen* and *Uykusuz*, everyone comments on each other's works and they brainstorm on different business models to produce the magazine more creatively and efficiently.

Let us finish this section with an anecdote from Atilla Atalay that depicts the editorial style of Oğuz Aral, who initiated this tradition of cartoon magazines. The humorists in *Gırgır* had to prepare their autobiographies for a section in the paper called: "Characters from *Gırgır* Prison". When Atalay wrote his autobiography, Aral called him twice and criticized his writing. Going back to his desk, Atalay grumbled on the corridors saying "Am I supposed to ask you how to even write my own life story?!" When Aral heard this, he called him back, showed him his elbow and said; "this is a sign of working hard (*dirsek çürütmek böyle bir şey!*). There are cartoonists working here. You are a writer and you need to make yourself read. You should write in such a way that we know you are a good humor writer." After that conversation, he said that he wrote an autobiography that received the highest number of weekly compliment letters from the readers.

This high-discipline tradition is to some extent still alive today but struggles to adapt itself to the changes in primary relations, including the newly emerging media technologies and means of communication. It is an open

question how the community culture created through the binding language of humor will be affected by reaching a wider, yet more heterogeneous audience and the increasing trend of individualism.

5.5. SUMMARY AND REVIEW

This section will provide a wrap up of the four main themes that emerged during this study regarding the social role and function of humor. Reading through the narratives, an intricate web of cross-links between different thematic statements occur, as there is generally more than one social function of humor expressed by each respondent. I will first recapitulate the schema emerging from the narratives based on the main themes on the social role of function, linking the seemingly diverse themes. Using concise examples from the interviews, I will demonstrate the interconnections and complexities.

Humor, by its nature can have both uniting and divisive effects within and between communicating parties. Whether it has a uniting or divisive impact essentially depends on the type of humor utilized. For instance, humor used in a self-reflective manner is regarded to be more “genuine” by most of the respondents of the research. Onur Ünlü, when describing the essence of humor, stated that:

Humor and irony have a strong connection to truth. Truth brings a smile to your face. It also creates a feeling of alienation. If you experience enlightenment on a certain matter, you feel alienated from the situation you are in and that brings about laughter. Once you become aware of it and learn how to use that door of perception, you may be closer to truth and humor. That process is a reflection of your inner relationship with your “self” and “ego”. One needs to be constantly alert and aware about that distinction,

which leads to a sense of humor.

Self-reflective humor creates self-awareness and being truthful and genuine strengthens the shared meaning perceived between communicators. Thus, a relationship of trust helps build a shared community and culture among the creators of humor and their audience (theme 4). The other side of the coin is superiority humor, which underlines the “differences” and points out the weaknesses and flaws of humorist’s target. In this sense, it also contributes to strengthening the group identity and cohesion but this time by differentiating the group members and excluding the outsiders. Let’s use part of a quote again by Onur Ünlü on censorship faced by Leyla and Mecnun (his TV series) while broadcasting on TRT to demonstrate this link:

It was one of the earlier episodes. Mecnun was suffering from love pain, so they have to get drunk and cry. We had grapes at lunch that day and during the same week the prime minister had said, “Don’t drink wine but eat grapes instead”. I said, “Bring grapes” and they got drunk eating grapes. That man needs to get drunk, so we find a way through humor.

The fact that it is not expressed directly does not inhibit the audience from understanding the hidden meaning behind that scene. In Onur Ünlü’s words:

This makes the prohibitive mindset even dumber, which is the fun side of it. You look at the guy in the eye and drink your wine. You only call it a different name and the stupid guy feels even more stupid. This is what gives pleasure to the audience and us. The prohibition makes us seem smarter and cooler than we actually are. But actually no, he is stupid.

This quote brings together several themes from this research. As explained earlier, in the context of Turkey, the community formation facilitated through humor often times corresponds to superiority humor. The shared sense of intellectual and cultural “superiority” among the consumers of certain types of humor undoubtedly derives from a sense of being “wittier” and more “intelligent” than their counterparts.

The use of euphemisms or symbols in their TV episode (grapes for wine), and making itself understood by a certain audience, causes the humorist and his audiences not only to feel smart (theme 2) but also as part of a community speaking the same language (theme 4). This narrative is also linked to the most frequent theme of the research: “humor being an oppositional/resistance force in society” (theme 1). Ünlü, in his narrative, mentions making “the prohibitive mindset even dumber” and deriving pleasure out of this mockery and resistance against bans.

In a parallel vein, in the case of satirical humor magazines in Turkey, subordinate groups who feel politically powerless, yet socially intelligent (theme 2) experience a sense of temporary superiority by ridiculing the dominant political leader or group. Thomas Hobbes defined superiority humor as “a sudden glory felt when one recognizes his/her supremacy over others”. In the case of Turkey the feeling of superiority especially derives from a conviction that the humorist and the audience enjoying their humor feel smarter than the target of the joke, i.e. the humorist uses a wittier language to express his thoughts and feelings. This is where the theme 4 intersects with theme 2. These themes are also linked to theme 1, because one

of the main purposes behind using this language and forming a community around it is “presenting an oppositional voice”.

The theme 2 and theme 4 serve to explain the mechanisms behind the social role of humor (“how” it is done through the use of witty language (theme 2) and formation of a community (theme 4). On the other hand, the “why” of it, i.e. the social purposes of humor are closely linked to theme 1 and theme 3. The main objectives enunciated as social roles of humor that emerged during the research are: being a source of opposition and resistance (theme 1), demolishing taboos (theme 1), an intelligent tool for defending oneself against violence (theme 2), providing relief and serving as an anti-depressant (theme 3) and giving hope and breathing space (theme 3).

As mentioned above, one of the most frequently enunciated objectives within the social role of humor is being a source of opposition and resistance (theme 1). Another social function fulfilled by humor in this context is linked to theme 2, providing “an intelligent tool for defending oneself against violence”. The elements within this narrative are also present in the earlier anecdote on eating grapes instead of wine, as it is a defense mechanism as well. There is however a clearer quotation mentioned in Chapter 4.2 from cartoonist Selçuk Erdem to demonstrate the connections here:

I adapted Banksy’s “flower thrower” figure as a penguin in the magazine during the Gezi protests. People liked it a lot. It spoke to a feeling in people: *responding in a witty manner, instead of throwing a rock*. It became part of the Gezi spirit. When you can visualize people’s feelings, they say, “That’s it!”

This is an example that brings together humor as using witty language to defend oneself (theme 2) and humor as a form of resistance (theme 1). It also corresponds to providing a feeling of revenge and thus relief, which is covered by theme 3, focusing on the social role of humor as a therapy mechanism and anti-depressant. These themes are actually connected to another major humor theory applicable in the context of this thesis, i.e. the relief theory of Freud.

The study found out that relief theory tangentially intersects with the third theme encountered during the interviews, i.e., humor serving as *an anti-depressant & a therapy mechanism* in Turkish society. In societies like Turkey, where the repressive tendencies of authorities and the conservative tendencies of the population are high, humor performs the role of an anti-depressant refining the darkness and sadness of life experiences. For instance, Met-Üst's definition of humor as quoted earlier in Chapter 4.3 presents it as one of the reasons to tolerate life:

You live and you die. Art is a way of making this period more meaningful. The humorist argues that this effort for meaning is futile, as we all will die. We use humor as an antidote, a tool for endurance and bearing hardships. For example, a father beats up his spoilt kid and tears are rolling down from the kid's eyes but he says, "it didn't hurt, it didn't hurt!" That's humor for us. We know that in reality it hurt so much...

In this case, humor serves the purpose of "letting off steam" by providing a sense of relief. Different than Freud's theory being focused more on the psychological and personal aspects of humor providing relief (such as sexual humor), the narratives in this thesis place the sense of relief in a social context. Some discourses focus on its potential to give hope, strength (theme

3) and thus be the catalyst for change by leading people to question the status quo and the injustices. Others insinuate a more passive form of relief, which almost has a numbing effect, making it easier to conform to the status quo. It is unclear whether this social role is essentially an active (almost bordering with theme 1) one or a passive one (within the boundaries of theme 3).

CHAPTER 6

GENERAL EVALUATION AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1. THE MAIN THESIS REVISITED

This study is the first of its kind to explore the social role of Turkish humor through the narratives of a collection of prominent humorists across a variety of genres. This study is unique because it engages the field of sociology to delve into the perspectives of this specific professional group. This work aims to provide fresh insights into Turkish society by applying a discourse analysis on the narratives of humorists in a historical perspective.

In this PhD research, the social role of humor in the narratives of three generation of humorists is taken up and interpreted through a content analysis. The themes that emerged are identified and placed within the context of significant sociological events impacting the narratives. Main social theories of humor, including superiority, incongruity and relief theories are used to provide the theoretical context in reading the meaning of narrations. The explanations within the humor theories shed light on how to interpret the contents of the narratives. Raising a question such as the “social role and function of humor” required digging deeper into the interdisciplinary field of humor studies to contextualize the research and fieldwork findings.

6.2. FIELDWORK AND DATA INTERPRETATION

Based on extensive fieldwork of semi-structured interviews with 48 humorists in the field, including cartoonists, comedy writers, performers, stand-up comedians, radio hosts, and social media figures, this thesis encompassed an unprecedented scope. The wide array of interviewees conducted with three generations of humorists ranging between the ages of 30 to 74 (their birth dates ranging from 1941 to 1985) and genre (humor magazines, theatre, cinema, television, radio, social media and writing across all mediums) increased the richness, variety and credibility of the narratives. The methodological strength of interviewing artists reaching wide audiences provided a more solid and grounded understanding of the shifts in societal expectations and tendencies scanning through the last thirty-five years of the Republic.

As the research was conducted with three generations of humorists, the period covered within this thesis is deliberately not limited to a certain predetermined time frame. It rather covered the time frame depicted in the narratives. However, it is important to point out that the humorous works produced by the narrators have been influential in the period since the 1970s up until today. As periodical benchmarks, the research focused on events that acquired meaning when referring to the changing social role of humor in the narratives. Some significant demarcation lines that emerged in the narratives of the humorists were 1980 coup d'état and the Gezi Park protests.

This thesis is a contribution to the literature as it applies a narrative analysis

inspired on the social role of humor. While the fieldwork specifically focuses on humorists' subjective accounts, it does not focus on the actual content and the mechanisms of their humor production, per se. It rather provides a sociological analysis based on the narratives of a professional group very much involved in reflecting the dynamics of and influencing society. It essentially reflects their perceptions of a presumed function and influence as the producers of humorous works. It also aims to portray how the changes in the sociopolitical context affect their narrations and perceptions regarding their work and its place in society.

This is evident by looking at the main research questions guiding the fieldwork and the analysis, i.e. how the humorists describe the social role of humor in Turkey in their narrations. In order to bring to light this main question, common sets of concepts and themes that define humorists' narrations on the role of humor were determined by analyzing the interviews. The key words and concepts within the interviews on social role of humor shaped the main findings. Discussions and narratives concentrating around certain themes and keywords are gathered under four main titles. Links were drawn between these themes and the definitions and ideas on the social role of humor outlined in major humor theories. In a parallel vein, the discontinuities and breaking points that surfaced in the narrations of humorists on the social role of humor were detected.

Finally, the bigger picture consisting of these narratives, including their relationships, convergences, as well as conflicting aspects were portrayed to complete this puzzle of humorists' narratives. While doing this, I tried to do

justice to the wealth of data and make it communicate to the reader with all its depth, including the harmonious complexities, as well as the disjunctions and contestations. I also contextualized the narratives by referring to main sociological events of the time to make sense of participants' interpretations. At the end of the day, the question that I asked myself was; "What's there in the data that you cannot deny?"

6.3. FINDINGS

Four main themes emerged on the social role of humor when the narratives of the humorists are analyzed comprehensively. An intricate web of cross-links between different thematic narratives was observed, as there is generally more than one social function of humor expressed by the respondents in their statements.

In humor literature, there are two main approaches regarding the social role of humor. The first approach is functionalist approach and is composed of three functions, including relief, social control and social cohesion. The second approach is conflict approach and it defines humor as a weapon and a defense mechanism, in other words, a tool for expressing resistance. This study illustrated that the themes that emerging from the fieldwork generally corresponded to those functions outlined in the literature.

Humor as opposition, rebellion and freedom of expression

The most frequently enunciated social function of humor during the field research appeared to be humor acting as an "*oppositional force in society*". The other subthemes that formed a unity of statements within this role and

complemented it included “being critical of the system”, “expressing resistance”, “pointing out the flaws in society and the ruling parties”, “siding with the underdog”, and “rebellion”. This theme coincides broadly with the conflict approach in the literature.

Weaving through the narratives concentrating around these themes, other related discussions emerged including how taboos and self-censorship in humor production were impacted by the country’s changing political and social background. Freedom of expression in one way or the other is always seen as a crucial aspect of humor, especially at times of tight political control, prohibitions and repression. The discussions revolving around this theme indicate that many interviewees view political repression as a constant in the Turkish Republic’s history. There have always been cycles of repression and attempts to restrict the freedom of public debate and expression. Humor is enunciated in the narratives to be one of the powerful tools used to fight this repressive tendency and challenge the authorities’ discourse.

On the other hand, the findings have indicated that the meaning of “opposition” and “critical humor” in the narratives of the humorists has changed in time, adapting to the economic and social circumstances at the time. Respondents from the generation, born in 1940s and 1950s and who have been producing in this field before the 1980 coup d’état, chose to articulate a more traditional, orthodox elucidation of “critical” mainly in the context of current, daily political struggles and conflicts.

Another important conclusion that emerged from the analysis of the

narratives points to a major rupture in the discourses of the interviewees. While the earlier generation of humorists mentioned above saw themselves as missionaries with the objective of “correcting the flaws of the society” in order to “improve” it; the youngest generation born in 1980s don’t seem to burden themselves with such a mission. They actually regard such an effort as “didactic”, “unnecessary” and “imposing” and define the social role of humor as “making people laugh”. In this context; the discourse formation in the later generation diverges significantly from the earlier generations.

Interestingly – respondents from the age group in-between (born in 1960s and 1970s) demonstrate a broader, more versatile approach. They prefer to use “critical humor” in a much broader sense of “having an open mind, independent of any dogmas” that applies to all spheres of life, not just daily politics. They focus on humorists’ social intelligence and ability to question the taken-for-grantedness of certain taboos and rules engrained in society.

While discussing the boundaries and taboos in the context of humor production, a differentiation among interviewees in coding and meaning attribution emerged. Most interviewees made a distinction between “conscience and common sense” vs. “censorship imposed by authorities”. While they define the first as a personal choice and disposition, the latter is regarded as having its roots in a fear of being reprimanded with monetary fines or court cases by political authorities. Not a single humorist interviewed admitted to applying self-censorship, which they regard as arbitrary restrictions and censorship imposed by authorities. However, interestingly enough, a close reading of their narratives reveals signs of self-

censorship in their work.

On the other hand, the findings indicated that a majority of the humorists do not question and dispute the unwritten requirements of what “common sense” dictates. Almost all humorists agree that the boundaries relying on “conscience”, such as child pedagogy, hate language and disabilities should be respected. In general, consulting “one’s conscience and common sense” when making a joke is praised. On the other hand, some of the humorists enunciated a broader definition of “common sense” and extended it to issues, such as religion, sex, and even politics at times.

Humor as witty defense

The second most frequent social role of humor emerged to be “*expression of feelings and thoughts in a witty manner*” and “*an intelligent tool for dealing with violent assaults and defending oneself*”. Other subthemes that emerged under this title can be summarized as “humor as a safety valve”, “the exaltation and relief that someone finally voiced my concerns”, almost a feeling of “revenge”. All these subthemes that converged within the narratives indicate a similarity to the functionalist approach viewing humor through the lens of “venting pressure” by providing relief and thus contributing to social control.

In the emergence of a wittier, less didactic humorous language to express oneself, there have been certain influential economic, social and cultural developments. In the post 1980 coup d’état environment, with the increasingly neo-liberal economic policies, technological developments,

promotion of consumption culture and individualism pumped up by the advertisements and mass culture in the colorful media, a new middle class emerged. Mostly working in the services, banking, finance and advertisement sectors, they contributed to the development of a new urban culture. This led to the demolition of the sense of “us” and the dissolution of old neighborhood culture and environment. This white-collar new middle class had a discourse that ironically distanced and differentiated itself from the traditional middle classes. A less didactic, funnier style based on witty outthinking has attained more success since the late 1990s, appealing to a younger, well-educated, urban middle class audience, who seem to be the new consumers of humor magazines.

Mainly the respondents born after the 1960s focus on the “witty expression” dimension of humorous language in their narratives. A new language to attract a different, “highly educated, middle class or student” audience was formulated to replace the political slogans or easily understandable formulas and symbols of the past. In this new age, little credit was given to stereotypes and clichés with the aim of producing a humor free from political slogans. The black and white stereotypical images and simple representations don’t really work at this age, such as the depiction of dark and evil figures behind every event, as expressed by the cartoonist, Selçuk Erdem.

This social role of “being a witty response against violent assaults” attributed to humor also resonates with the younger generation, born in mid-1980s and work in diverse areas, such as cartoon magazines, social media and radio. In this context, the study found out that the inherent mission of humor to be

critical and serve, as a weapon to defend oneself remains the same. However, the language and style used to serve that social role varies and shifts depending on the episteme of the period.

Humor as therapy, hope and survival

The study has illustrated that the third most frequent social role of humor in the narratives of the humorists is humor serving as *“an anti-depressant & a therapy mechanism”* in Turkish society. The other theme that converged and formed a unity with this statement was humor that gave *strength, hope and a sense of carrying on* by creating *a breath of fresh air, a new way of looking at the world*. This theme coincided with the functionalist approach that focuses on humor’s ability to stabilize and transform the anger in society, thus acting as a social control mechanism.

As very succinctly summarized by one of the cartoonists, Bahadır Baruter, the lack of democracy in families, education system and politics in a society where the strong oppresses the weak creates an environment where humor serves the function of *“an anti-depressant”*. These difficult social conditions and *“the dirty world out there”* are refined through the lens of humor. This creates a therapy environment in which people can confront their realities. As B. Baruter said earlier in this thesis, *“it is an awful country on one hand; it will never become Sweden. However, it is wonderful on the other hand, thank God it won’t become Sweden!”*

Baruter argues that only Latin America has a similar cartoon magazine culture to Turkey. He reasons it by saying that it is also a *“miserable place*

dealing with tons of taboos like us". This statement actually resonates with the first theme, i.e. the social function of humor to be critical and break taboos. They are part of a "network of statements" in which they coexist at times. They may even have a relationship of reciprocal determination as Turkey being a "miserable place dealing with tons of taboos" also implies that humor has the potential of being used as a tool of therapy, almost an anti-depressant.

There is a unity of statements among humorists interviewed that focus on the potential of humor to provide an outlet for anger and frustration during times of hardship, thus providing an antidote/pain killer, and at the same time expressing hope for a better future. Some of them raise their anger and frustration with the hope that humor will be the catalyst for change by leading people to question the status quo and the injustices they witness daily. It remains to be explored in further research whether the consumption of this "anti-depressant" makes the person feel stronger to struggle for change or just has a numbing effect making it easier to conform to the status quo.

Humor as self-reflection, communication & community

The last theme has two dimensions: one occurring at the individual level and the other at the society level. The narratives revolving around the self-reflection aspect of humor -a personal maturity to reach the level of self-deprecation- generally intersected with the statements emphasizing the role of humor in increasing social cohesion (functional approach) through the formation of a common language; "the language of humor". The theme of

self-reflection through humor formed a unity of statements with themes, such as humor being a tool for increasing social communication and tolerance; as well as humor facilitating the formation of a community through a strong fellow-feeling and common binding language among its audience.

On the other hand, the creation of a community culture and common language also forms boundaries that exclude certain groups. Humor being a double-edged sword can maintain identification and unity among members of one group while stressing contradictions and differences they have with others. Therefore, it is ambiguous whether it increases tolerance and social cohesion or creates divisions among certain camps and feelings of superiority.

Exclusion often times in narratives comes across as targeting the oppressiveness of whoever is in power, and therefore is in close interplay with the function of “opposition” and “resistance”. When juxtaposed against each other, it becomes apparent that functionalist approach (social cohesion aspect) and the conflict approach (resistance, opposition) may very well coexist.

Social cohesion in this context rather indicates a segment of the population sharing similar values and aspirations. The bond they establish through humor, often times serves as a weapon to criticize the oppressive policies of power holders. Through the narratives, it becomes visible that they regard themselves as intellectually superior, by the use of witty language and symbols (theme 2). However they don’t have enough voice in the actual

policy making processes, so they use humor in order to make up for that deprivation.

Another point of discussion around these themes focused on the changing technology and increasing individualism and how these are impacting the community culture, created through the bonding language of humor. The existence of a seamless bond between the humorists and the masses has been repeatedly enunciated especially in the narrations of the cartoonists. Cartoon magazines, since the 1970s Girgir, have served as instruments of creating a fellow feeling among people thinking and feeling the same way. This theme is also related on a deeper level to the theme of humor as an *“expression of feelings and thoughts in a witty manner”* (theme 2). In this sense, cartoon magazines have created a shared community of followers, an audience who have embraced them as friends or even comrades, with a mix of emotions, including admiration and solidarity.

The impacts of the innovations in the communications technology and dissemination tools as well as the increasing individualism have been raised as issues when discussing this theme. While some value the communal magazine culture, others put more emphasis on the merits of individualization of humor, complaining that the magazine cartoonists eventually become quasi civil servants and lose their excitement. It is an open question how the community culture created through the binding language of humor will be affected by reaching a wider, yet more heterogeneous audience and the increasing trend of individualism.

In this context, Gezi protests presented a significant breaking point determining the majority of the narratives. Humorists focused on the Gezi protests as a shift in the use of humor across Turkish society, in terms of its power as an anti-depressant. They said humor played a critical role as a societal safety valve.

The above-mentioned advances in communications technology and social media created unprecedented platforms and opportunities for a variety of new humor styles, forms and products to become visible during the uprising. These tools were instrumental in spreading the witty political humor produced on the streets to the masses following it on social media from their homes. If the “streets become a humor magazine” in the words of Vedat Özdemiroğlu, this inevitably makes an impact on how the humorists, especially the cartoonists view themselves, their work and the role of it within society.

Some participants argued that Gezi protests found its inspiration in the decades-long humor magazine culture in Turkey. Others focused on personal aspects of humor, praising individual geniuses emerging from the streets. As joyous and exciting as this whole event was, it was also a challenging prospect for humorists to keep up with so much competition of young, brilliant voices. The humorists have even for a brief moment questioned the mission of humor magazines “being the voice of masses” and “expressing the discontent and grievances” in society. As sociopolitical changes take place, humorists also look for alternative means to ‘readjust’ their mission and role in the eyes of their followers and society at large.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A- LIST OF INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED

- 1) Behiç Ak (Cartoonist, Cumhuriyet, December 2014, İstanbul)
- 2) Tuncay Akgün (Cartoonist, Leman, February 2014, İstanbul)
- 3) Metin Akpınar (Actor, Eylül 2014, İstanbul)
- 4) Burak Aksak (Humor/script writer, January 2015, İstanbul)
- 5) Bülent Aksu (Karagöz Theatre Puppeteer, March 2014, İstanbul)
- 6) Gizem Aldemir (Actress, AST, February 2013, Ankara)
- 7) Şevket Altuğ (Actor, April 2014, İstanbul)
- 8) Seda Apaydın (Actress, Seyr-ü Sefer, April 2014, İzmir)
- 9) Tacettin Arıtürkelisi (Actor, Seyr-ü Sefer, April 2014, İzmir)
- 10) Cem Arkon (Actor, Tiyatora, April 2014, İzmir)
- 11) Atilla Atalay (Humor/script writer, Leman, November 2014, İstanbul)
- 12) Bahadır Baruter (Cartoonist, Penguen, November 2013, İstanbul)
- 13) Hakan Bilginer (Humor Writer, Zaytung, November 2014, İstanbul)
- 14) Umur Bugay (Humor/script writer, December 2013, İstanbul)
- 15) Turgut Çeviker (Cartoon Historian, March 2014, İstanbul)
- 16) Oktay Demirci (Radio Show Host, Modern Sabahlar, January 2015, Ankara)
- 17) Cem Dinlenmiş (Cartoonist, Penguen, December 2013, İstanbul)
- 18) Murat Emres (Actor, Matrak Adamlar, April 2014, İzmir)
- 19) Özgür Eraslan (Actor, Seyr-ü Sefer, April 2014, İzmir)
- 20) Ece Ercan (Stand-up comedian, April 2014, İstanbul)

- 21) Selçuk Erdem (Cartoonist, Penguen, November 2013, İstanbul)
- 22) Kemal Kenan Ergen (Humor/script writer, January 2014, İstanbul)
- 23) Mehmet Esen (Actor, November 2013, İstanbul)
- 24) Tan Cemal Genç (Cartoonist, June 2014, İstanbul)
- 25) Müjdat Gezen (Actor/ Humor Writer, March 2014, İstanbul)
- 26) Zihni Göktaş (Actor, İstanbul City Theatre, January 2014)
- 27) Güneri İçoğlu (Cartoonist, Leman, February 2014, İstanbul)
- 28) Ragıp İncesagır (Humor Festival Coordinator, October 2013, İstanbul)
- 29) Volkan Kantoğlu (Stand-up comedian, November 2013, İstanbul)
- 30) Deniz Karalar (Karagöz Theatre Puppeteer, March 2014, İstanbul)
- 31) Ege Kayacan (Radio Show Host, Modern Sabahlar, January 2015, Ankara)
- 32) Cem Kızıltuğ (Cartoonist, Zaman, May 2014, İstanbul)
- 33) Kandemir Konduk (Humor/script writer, December 2013, İstanbul)
- 34) OKY (Cartoonist, Uykusuz, December 2013, İstanbul)
- 35) Fahir Ögünç (Radio Show Host, Modern Sabahlar, January 2015, Ankara)
- 36) Vedat Özdemiroğlu (Humor Writer, Uykusuz, February 2014, İstanbul)
- 37) Behiç Pek (Cartoonist, Leman, March 2014, İstanbul)
- 38) Kutlukhan Perker (Cartoonist, Penguen, December 2013, İstanbul)
- 39) Önem Pişkin (Actor, Matrak Adamlar, April 2014, İzmir)
- 40) Bora Seçkin (Theatre Director and Actor, İstanbul City Theatre, February 2014)
- 41) Cihat Tamer (Actor, November 2013, İstanbul)
- 42) Memo Tembelçizer (Cartoonist, Uykusuz, November 2013, İstanbul)

- 43) Yüksel Ünal (Stand-up comedian, April 2014, İzmir)
- 44) Onur Ünlü (Film/TV Director, January 2014, İstanbul)
- 45) METin ÜSTündağ (Cartoonist, Penguen, OT, November 2014, İstanbul)
- 46) Yasemin Yalçın (Actress, February 2014, İstanbul)
- 47) Erdil Yaşaroğlu (Cartoonist, Penguen, November 2013, İstanbul)
- 48) Nasreddin Hoca's Village, March 2014 (Assorted Interviews).
- 49) Hasankeyf Field Trip, April 2014 (Assorted Interviews).

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS¹⁶

- 1- What do people laugh at most? How does laughter change depending on the time period concerned?
- 2- If you make a comparison among periods, how did the sociopolitical and cultural climate in the country affect humor? What changes, what stays the same?
- 3- If humor has a quality of questioning the status quo, how does this come across in the humor produced in Turkey? (In other words, what can be expressed through humor that cannot be expressed through other means?)
- 4- There are different views on the social role of humor. Some say comedy is a cowardly act; it reaffirms the already existing beliefs and ideas. Some view it as a relief mechanism venting off the pressure in society. Some see it as a form of rebellion. Taking into account different mediums, what do you think is the social role of humor in Turkey?
- 5- How do the advances in the communications technology and social media impact humor content and production in Turkey?

¹⁶ While the interview questions differ depending on the participant, this appendix presents the most common and generic questions used during interviews.

- 6- Are there any areas you abstain from making jokes about? How critical do you think is self-censorship when making humor in Turkey today?
- 7- What is humor for you? Does it have an objective/mission? Do you expect it to contribute to social change or not?
- 8- How close is your humor to the “ideal humor” in your mind? Is it just an economical activity in your life or beyond that? Is it central or periphery?
- 9- Do you regard humor as an individual or communal creation? To what extent do you adapt to the expectations of the audiences?
- 10- Please expand about comedy acting vs. drama acting.
- 11- What are some pros and cons of producing humor in Turkey? Does humor refresh hope or is it generally just an escape?
- 12- How do you draw the fine line between being subversive and disrupting the accepted way of looking at things vs. preaching/imposing your political agenda?
- 13- Do you define satire as being political only (dealing with daily politics) or can it include social commentary (satirizing social conditions and norms)?

APPENDIX C: CURRICULUM VITAE

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Surname, Name: Eğilmezler Boylan, Melike
Nationality: Turkish (TC)
Date and Place of Birth: 30 September 1976, İstanbul
Marital Status: Married
Phone: +90 532 683 5114
email: pelinmelike@gmail.com

EDUCATION

<i>Degree</i>	<i>Institution</i>	<i>Year of Graduation</i>
Ph.D.	METU Department of Sociology	2015
MA	Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) Specialization: International Relations and International Economics	2004
BA	Marmara University Department of Political Science and International Relations	1998
High School	Hüseyin Avni Sözen Anatolian High School, İstanbul	1994

WORK EXPERIENCE

August 2011- Present MINISTRY OF ECONOMY Ankara, Turkey

FOREIGN TRADE EXPERT, General Directorate of Agreements, Department of Services Trade Agreements

- Worked on the development and implementation of Turkey's services trade policy including the negotiation, monitoring and enforcement of bilateral, regional and multilateral agreements
- Communicated and collaborated closely with government institutions and other partners including trade associations, professional bodies, civil society and academia involved in services trade for policy analysis and determination of Turkey's negotiation position
- Served as the trade negotiator for Turkey in multilateral and bilateral services trade negotiations at the World Trade Organization and Free Trade Agreements with significant trade partners

May 2004- August 2007 WORLD BANK Washington, DC

CONSULTANT

Social Protection Group, Health Nutrition and Population Group

- Carried out a stocktaking exercise and contributed to a book chapter on "Pensions in World Bank Lending and Analytical Work, 1984-2007"
- Conducted quality assessment and portfolio reviews on World Bank social protection and reproductive health portfolio of the World Bank for a quality assessment exercise to improve results in Bank operations.

Operation Policies and Country Services

- Reviewed World Bank supported projects in terms of sector and thematic categories to improve the monitoring of Bank inputs and outputs for allocation of Bank resources in line with the Millennium Development Goals
- Prepared the Sector Strategy Implementation Update with a dataset to measure output and success in certain sectors including health, public sector governance and finance.

- Evaluated Structural Adjustment Loans completed between 1995 – 2004, as part of an internal efficiency assessment exercise aimed at tracking outcome oriented trends in World Bank’s lending programs

June 2005- September 2005

UNICEF

Orissa, India

CONSULTANT, Knowledge Community for Children in India Program

- Participated in field research and prepared a case study and a documentary film on the short-term impacts of IMNCI (Integrated Management of Neonatal and Childhood Illnesses) strategy on infant mortality rates and reproductive and child health outcomes in Orissa

Dec 1998- Aug 2002 UNDERSECRETARIAT OF TREASURY Ankara, Turkey

TREASURY EXPERT, General Directorate of Banking and Exchange, External Relations Department

- Coordinated the harmonization of Turkish legislation to the European Union Acquis in the fields of capital movements and services trade
- Conducted consultations with various stakeholders to determine Turkey’s position vis-a-vis OECD Codes of Liberalization of Capital Movements and Invisible Transactions

PUBLICATIONS

- Case Study on Child Survival, The Short-term Effects of Integrated Management of Newborn and Childhood Illnesses (IMNCI) in Orissa, India: Jehu Abiram, Melike Egilmezler, Gabriel Pietrzak, Khushbindar Kaur Lally, Daihrii Kajene Kharsi, Summer Internship Programme 2005, March 2009, UNICEF India
- Book chapter: Richard Hinz, Melike Egilmezler, Sergei Biletsky, “Pensions in World Bank Lending and Analytical Work, 1984-2007”, Chapter 4 in *Social Protection and Labor at the World Bank, 2000-2008*, Robert Holzmann (ed.), World Bank Publications, 2008
- Boylan, Melike Eğılmezler, Article (September 2013) “ When Hacivat and Karagöz travelled to Taksim”. Journal of Turkish Weekly.
- Boylan, Melike Eğılmezler, Article (August 2014) “Why do Turkish Leaders Fear Humor?” Your Middle East.

ADDITIONAL SKILLS

Languages: *Turkish (Native), English (Fluent), French (Intermediate), Italian (Intermediate), Spanish (Basic)*

Computer Skills: Windows XP, Outlook, Word, Excel, Power Point

Interests: Volunteer work (The Educational Volunteers Foundation (TEGV), Ankara Photographers Association- World Bank Joint Project (2010): “Teaching Photography to Youth with Hearing Disabilities”), documentary photography, languages and cultures, traveling.

APPENDIX D: TURKISH SUMMARY

Bu doktora tezi Türk toplumunda mizahın sosyal rolünü ve işlevlerini farklı mecralarda üretim yapan önde gelen mizahçıların anlatıları üzerinden incelemektedir. Birçok akademik çalışmada mizah, psikoloji ve felsefe disiplinleri kapsamında ele alınmış olduğundan, bu özgül meslek grubunun bakış açılarını sosyoloji bilim dalından yararlanarak araştıran bu çalışma bir ilk olma niteliğini

taşımaktadır. Mizahçıların anlatıları üzerinden tarihsel bir perspektifte söylem analizi yapılarak, Türk toplumuna dair yeni bir bakış açısı sunmak bu çalışmanın amacını oluşturmaktadır.

Çalışma; mizah dergisi, tiyatro, sinema, televizyon, radyo, sosyal medya ve yazılı alanda olmak üzere değişik mecralarda mizah üreten; 30 ile 74 yaş grubu aralığındaki mizahçıların anlatılarına dayanmaktadır. Türkiye çapında 48 mizah sanatçısı ile 24 ay gibi bir zaman dilimi içinde, yaratıcılık ve yetenek, ifade özgürlüğünün sınırları, tabular ve mizahın toplumdaki rolü ve işlevi gibi konuları kapsayan derinlemesine görüşmeler bu tezin temelini oluşturmaktadır. Görüşme yapılan sanatçıların ortak özelliği 1970'lerden beri Türkiye'de mizahi içeriğin yaratımında, üretiminde ve hayata geçirilmesinde yer almalarıdır. Katılımcıların çeşitliliği, toplanan verinin zenginliğini ve derinliğini arttırmıştır.

Araştırma Soruları

Araştırmanın başında, hem bu tez çalışması için yol gösterici olması hem de mülakat sorularına bir hazırlık teşkil etmesi amacıyla aşağıdaki araştırma

soruları tasarlanmıştır:

- Mizahçılar anlatılarında Türkiye’de mizahın rolünü nasıl tanımlamaktadırlar?
- Mizahçıların anlatıları, ülkedeki sosyopolitik arka planın mizah üretimi ve mizahın sosyal rolüne etkisine ilişkin neler içermektedir?

Kavramsal çerçeve

Bu tez için yapılan saha çalışmasında toplanan anlatı bütünü çözümlenebilmek amacıyla, sosyal mizah teorileri kavramsal çerçeve olarak kullanılmıştır. Asırlar boyunca, filozofların bir kısmı kahkahanın doğası gereği isyankar, demokratik ve ilerici olduğunu savunurken, diğerleri kültürel olarak sınırlayan ve statükoyu destekleyen yönüne dikkat çekiyor.

Ünlü Fransız düşünür Henri Bergson gülmenin disipline eden ve hizaya sokan yönünden bahseder; çünkü genellikle topluma uyum sağlayamayan bireylere güleriz. Öte yandan Rus filozof ve edebiyat eleştirmeni Mikhail Bakhtin güldüğümüz anların en özgür olduğumuz zamanlar olduğunu iddia eder; çünkü içinde yaşadığımız dünyanın verili kurallarını sorgulayıp tersine çevirdiğimiz yegane zamandır. Mizahın bu çift yönlü doğası, akışkanlığı ve öngörülemez oluşu onu hem zor, hem de ilgi çekici bir çalışma konusu kılıyor.

Antik Yunan’da filozoflar, hastalık ve depresyona karşı mizahi bakışı teşvik etmelerine karşın, komediyi alt sınıftan insanların meşgalesi gibi görmüşler.

Plato, Sokrat'la diyaloglarını içeren M.Ö. 380 tarihli Devlet'te, kahkahanın sıkı bir biçimde kontrol edilmesi ve otoriteye karşı kullanılmaması gerektiğini öne sürüyor. Plato'nun öğrencisi Aristo ise "bir bebek gülmeye başladığı kırk günlük haline kadar tam bir insan sayılamaz" diyerek gülmeye övgü düzse de (Stott, 2005), komedilerde "ortalamanın altında" kusurlu insanların canlandırıldığını söylüyor (Billig, 2005: 43). Seyirci de kendini bu "komik" tiplerle kıyasla üstün hissederek bir ego tatmini yaşıyor ve gülüyor. Bu teoriye *üstünlük teorisi* deniyor.

Sinik ve materyalist olmakla tanınan 17. yüzyıl İngiliz filozofu Thomas Hobbes da bu düşünceyi doğrulayarak, mizahın üstünlüğümüzü fark ettiğimizde hissettiğimiz "ani zafer" hissinden doğduğunu söylüyor. Bu tür komedi eğlenceli olabilse de, genellikle ırkçı, cinsiyetçi şakalarda ortaya çıkan ukala ve alaycı bir gülmeyi içermektedir. Var olan önyargıları arttırarak, birleştirici olmaktan çok ayrıştıran bir yöne sahiptir.

Üstünlük teorisi 18. Yüzyılın ortalarında eleştirilince, farklı teoriler ortaya çıkmış. 18. yüzyıl İngiltere'sinin kahvelerinde beliren yeni bir centilmen türü kaba şakalar ile ince espri, diğer deyişle nükte arasındaki farkı tartışmaya başlamışlar. *Aykırılık teorisi*, böylelikle aydınlanmacı düşünürlerden John Locke tarafından gündeme getirilmiş ve modern felsefenin babası sayılan Immanuel Kant tarafından geliştirilmiş. Kant'a göre, absürt bir durum oluştuğunda ve beklentilerimiz boşa çıktığında güleriz. Dünyaya dair düşüncelerimiz ile deneyimlediğimiz gerçeklik uyuşmaz.

Mizah konusunda en bilinen teorilerden birini üreten Fransız filozof H.

Bergson'un teorisinde de hem üstünlük, hem de aykırılık teorisinden unsurlar bulunur. Bergson komik olan durumların, insanın yaşam özünü yitirdiği, adeta makinenin bir parçası olduğu ve katı hareketler sergilediği anlar olduğunu iddia eder. Esneklik gösteremediği için hayatın "gerçeklerine" uyum sağlayamayan Don Kişot gibi takıntılı ve her daim dalgın karakterler ona göre komiktir. Mizah toplumun eksantrik ve farklı olana gülerek onu hizaya sokma girişimidir.

Hizaya getirilen bireylerin mizahla ilişkisini ise, psikanaliz kuramının mucidi Avusturyalı düşünür Sigmund Freud açıklamış. Freud ve 19. Yüzyıl filozofu Herbert Spencer tarafından ortaya atılan rahatlama teorisine göre mizah, baskı ile oluşturulan gerilimin boşaltılabilmesi için bir araçtır. Şakalar tabu olarak görülen konularda bilinçaltı düşüncelerimizi açığa çıkarır. İşin mizahi tarafını görebilmek, Freud'a göre gündelik badireler ve düş kırıklıkları ile boğuşan "çocuksu ben" in ötesine geçebilmektir (Freud, 1986). Gerçek manasıyla yetişkin olmak biraz da mizah duygusuna sahip olmak demektir.

Son olarak, bu tezde mizahın toplumsal muhalefet potansiyeline dair, Rus dilbilimci M. Bakhtin'in karnaval kavramı ele alınmaktadır. Karnavallar, komedinin ilk ortaya çıktığı Dionysos bahar ve üreme şenlikleri ile benzerlik taşımaktadır. Orta Çağ'da kilise ya da devletin empoze ettiği baskıcı dile karşın halkın çok sesliliğini yansıtır. Hiyerarşiler yıkılır; yeme, içme, üreme, şaklabanlık gibi aşağılanan eylemler özgürce gerçekleştirilir. Karnaval, dünyanın alıştığımız düzenini tersine çevirir. Güçlü/güçsüz ya da halk/soylu gibi kavramların içini boşaltır. Chaplin'in Diktatör filmiyle

Hitler'in parodisini yapması ve onu budala durumuna düşürmesi Bakhtin usulü grotesk gülmeye bir örnektir (Sanders, 2001: 303). Öte yandan Bakhtin, iktidarın özellikle karnaval gibi görece özgür bir alana izin vererek, kendisine yönelik tepkilerin deşarj edilip dağıtılmasını sağladığını, böylece karnaval dışındaki zamanlarda otoritesini sürdürdüğünü ima eder.

Yukarıda kısaca özetlenen teorilerde ele alınan mizahın sosyal rolüne ilişkin görüşler, bu tez çalışmasında mülakatlarda derlenen fikirlerle ve temalarla örtüştüğü ölçüde kullanılmıştır. Araştırma soruları çerçevesinde, görüşmelerde ortaya çıkan ve katılımcıların mizah ürettikleri toplumun özelliklerine dair öznel görüşleri, mizah teorileri kapsamında analiz edilmiştir.

Bu çerçevede sahadan toplanan verilerin analizi sonucunda ortaya çıkan dört ana tema, mizah teorilerince açıklanan, mizahın sosyal rolüne ilişkin görüşlerin bazılarıyla benzerlik arz etmektedir. Locke, Kant, Schopenhauer gibi filozofların üzerine yazdığı teorilerden birisi olan uyumsuzluk teorisi, mizahın yıkıcı yönüne işaret etmektedir. Kant'ın görüşlerine göre, mizah kendisinden önce var olan ve kabul edilmiş bir gerçekliği sorgulayıp tersine çevirir. Böylelikle, "doğalmış" gibi görünen güç dengelerindeki uyumsuzlukları insanların gözünde belirgin hale getirir. Verili kültürel normları zeka yoluyla alt üst ederek eleştiri olanakları yaratır.

Bu teori, bulgular kısmında detaylı olarak ele alınacak ikinci tema olan "duygu ve düşüncelerin zeka yoluyla ifade edilmesi" hususunda açıklayıcı bir teori olarak ele alınmıştır. Mizahçıların anlatıları, içinde bulundukları

ekonomik ve sosyal arka plan tarafından belirlendiği için, ikinci tema uyumsuzluk teorisinden izler taşımakla beraber, Türkiye bağlamında birtakım yeni özellikler de edinmektedir. Bu özelliklerden biri mizahçıların, mizahın sosyal rolünü “şiddetli saldırılar ve baskılara karşı kendini savunmak için zekice bir araç” olarak tanımlamalarıdır. Uyumsuzluk teorisinin temel önermesi baki kalmakla beraber, bu tür mizahın ne amaçla kullanıldığı meselesi bağlama göre değişmektedir.

Bu tezde kullanılan bir diğer mizah teorisi olan üstünlük teorisi, başkalarına üstün geldiğimiz anlarda yaşadığımız zafer hissini mizahın kaynağı olarak görmektedir. Üstünlük teorisi, aynı zamanda mizah dergilerinde ya da siyasi hiciv programlarında siyasi figürlerin aptal, despot veya deli gibi gösterilerek aşağılanması gibi örnekleri de içermektedir. Türkiye’deki mizahçıların anlatılarının analizi esnasında da üstünlük teorisinin izlerini görmek mümkündür. Üstünlük teorisi dendiğinde genellikle akla cinsiyetçi ve ırkçı mizah örnekleri gelse de, anlatılarda bu tür mizah örnekleri öne çıkmamaktadır. Bu çalışma mizah ürünlerinin kendisinden ziyade, mizahçıların anlatılarına odaklandığı için “üstünlük teorisi” ancak anlatılarda görünür olduğu biçimiyle ele alınmıştır. Bu teorinin izlerine, anlatılarda dördüncü tema olarak ortaya çıkan “mizahı üreten ve tüketenler arasında ortak bir entelektüel ve kültürel üstünlük hissi yaratmak” ta rastlanmaktadır. Türkiye’deki mizah dergileri örneğinde, siyaseten güçsüz hisseden grupların, baskın politik lider ya da partileri küçük düşürerek ve dalga geçerek geçici de olsa hissettikleri üstünlük duygusuna karşılık gelmektedir.

Anlatılarda bu iki teorinin örtüştüğü ve birbiriyle ilişkilendiği noktalar da mevcuttur. Mizahın tüketicilerinin paylaştığı bu zihinsel ve kültürel “üstünlük” duygusu, karşıtlarından daha “zeki” ya da “hazırcevap” oldukları hissinden kaynaklanmaktadır. Bu anlatı “düşünce ve duyguların zekayla ifade edilmesi” başlıklı ikinci temaya yakın olmakla beraber, her iki tema da “mizahın toplumda muhalif bir güç olması” temasıyla (birinci tema) bağlantılıdır.

Bu tez çalışması kapsamında sahadan toplanan verilerle bağlantılı olduğu tespit edilen son mizah teorisi Freud’un rahatlama teorisidir. Freud’a göre, komik bir tür maskesini düşürmedir; bir başka deyişle, gündelik olarak bastırmak durumunda kaldığımız dürtülerin özgürce ifade edilmesidir. Şakalar ve mizah yoluyla toplumun bizi disipline etme eğilimine karşı dururuz. O nedenle şakalar da en çok tabular, sosyal yasaklar gibi konulara odaklanır (Billig, 2005: 155).

Rahatlama teorisi, mülakatlarda en çok rastlanan üçüncü tema olan mizahın bir tür anti-depresan ve terapi mekanizması olmasına ilişkin temayla bağdaşmaktadır. Siyasi otoritelerin baskıcı eğilimlerinin ve nüfusun muhafazakar eğilimlerinin yüksek olduğu toplumlarda, mizah yaşam tecrübelerinin karanlığını rafine eden bir anti-depresan vazifesi görmektedir. Stresi azaltan ve iç rahatlama yaratan bir etkisi olan mizah, Freud’un teorisinde daha çok kişisel alanda tezahür ederken, bu tezdeki anlatılarda sosyal hayattaki adaletsiz durumlara dair rahatlama sağlamaktadır. Bu nedenle, devam etme gücü ve umut verme, yeni bir bakış açısı sağlama temalarıyla bağlantılıdır.

METODOLOJİ

J. W. Creswell'in yaptığı niteliksel araştırmanın temel özellikleri tanımı (2003: 181) çerçevesinde, bu çalışmada da aşağıdaki özellikler mevcuttur:

Araştırma doğal bir ortamda gerçekleştirilmiştir. Alana doğrudan gidilerek, katılımcılarla evlerinde veya iş mekanlarında görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Böylece, görüşülen kişiye dair daha derinlemesine bir kavrayış edinilmesini sağlamıştır.

Bu çalışmada "etkileşimli ve insancıl" (Creswell, 2003: 181) çoklu veri toplama metodu kullanılmıştır. Görüşme yapılan mizahçıların gönüllü katılımı hedeflenmiş ve katılımcılar nezdinde güven tesis edilmesine gayret edilmiştir. Bu da sakin ve sorunsuz bir veri toplama sürecini beraberinde getirmiş, katılımcılar çekinmeden görüş ve deneyimlerini aktarmış, hatta olası başka katılımcıların iletişim bilgilerini sakınmadan paylaşmışlardır.

Yine Creswell'in tanımına göre niteliksel çalışmalar önceden belirlenmiş değildir; bilakis süreç içinde gelişim gösterirler. Bu çalışmada da başlangıçta hazırlanan araştırma soruları süreç içinde geliştirilmiştir. Araştırma ortamları ve katılımcılara ilişkin gerek nesilleri, gerekse mizah üretimleri açısından aşinalık kazandıkça, araştırma soruları rafine edilmiştir. Önceki mülakatlarda değinilen referans ve görüşlere ileriki görüşmelerde atıfta bulunarak, araştırma ilerledikçe bilgi ve anlayışta derinleşme olanağı bulunmuştur. Bu yaklaşım sayesinde öncelikle genel bir kavrayış elde ederek, daha sonra detaylı tematik analiz yapabilmek mümkün olmuştur.

Bu çalışmada anlatı araştırmasına dayanan niteliksel bir yöntemin kullanımı, araştırmacının görüşmelerde aktif bir katılımcı olmasını ve görüşmeyi gerektikçe yeni sorular ve yorumlarla daha katmanlı ve zengin kılmasına yardımcı olmuştur. Böylece, sorular literatürdeki mizah teorilerine dayanmakla beraber, görüşmeler esnasında bu teorilerin Türkiye’deki mizahçıların anlatıları bağlamında nasıl uygulanacağını nüansları keşfedilmiştir.

Niteliksel araştırmalar özünde yorumlayıcı olduğu için, araştırmacının verileri belirli bir sosyal-politik ve tarihi andaki kişisel lensinden süzmesini gerektirir. Nitekim, bu tez çalışmasında da, katılımcıların cevaplarının araştırmacı tarafından yorumlanması, takip eden tamamlayıcı sorular oluşturulmasına ve araştırmanın tasarımının iyileştirilmesine katkıda bulunmuştur. Mizah dilinin çok etkin biçimde kullanıldığı Haziran 2013 Gezi Parkı direnişinin öncesinde başlayan bu çalışmada, mülakatların neredeyse tamamına yakını Gezi’den sonra yapılmıştır. Bu durumda, hem araştırmacının, hem de görüşülen mizahçıların yorumları varolan sosyal politik andan ve ortamdan etkilenmiştir.

Niteliksel bir araştırmacının temel özelliklerinden biri olarak tanımlanan, “sosyal olguları bütüncül biçimde görebilme” hususiyeti bağlamında, bu tez çalışması da karmaşık, birbiriyle etkileşim halinde olan anlatılar bütünü bir araya getirip yorumlarken geniş, adeta panoramik bir bakış benimsemiştir. Bu çalışmadaki akıl yürütme büyük ölçüde tümevarımcı olmakla beraber, düşünme süreci mizah teorileri ile veri toplama ve veri

analizi arasında mekik dokuyan bütüncül bir yapı içinde gerçekleşmiştir.

2.3. VERİ TOPLAMA SÜRECİ

Bu çalışmada kullanılan niteliksel veri, yarı yapılandırılmış, açık uçlu, derinlemesine görüşmeler neticesinde elde edilmiştir. E-posta yolu ile cevaplarını göndermeyi tercih eden birkaç katılımcı dışında tüm görüşmeler yüz yüze gerçekleştirilmiştir. Uygun katılımcıları tespit edebilmek için amaçlı örnekleme yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Katılımcıların kendi sosyal ağlarındaki diğer mizahçıların iletişim bilgilerini cömertçe paylaşmaları, araştırmanın seyrini kolaylaştırmış ve veri zenginliğini arttırmıştır. Görüşülen örneklemin homojen olmayıp farklı mecralardan mizahçıları kapsaması araştırma için bir zayıflık değil, bilakis bir güç kaynağı olmuştur. Araştırma sorusunun farklı mecra ve yaş gruplarının bakış açısıyla okunması, örneklem içindeki ortak ve ayrışan temaların belirlenmesine yardımcı olmuştur.

Görüşülen 48 katılımcı arasında; 14 karikatürist, 13 oyuncu (tiyatro, sinema, TV), 7 mizah yazarı, 3 stand-up komedyen, 3 radyo programı yapımcısı, 2 televizyon/sinema yönetmeni, 2 geleneksel kuklacı (Karagöz), 1 mizah festivali organizatörü, 1 karikatür tarihçisi, 1 satirik sosyal medya sitesi (Zaytung) direktörü bulunmaktadır. Bunlardan 11 kişi dışında tümü İstanbul'da ikamet etmektedir. 4'ü Ankara'da, 7'si İzmir'de yaşamaktadır.

Veri toplama prosedürleri aşağıdaki unsurları içermektedir:

- 1- GÖZLEMLER: Araştırma sürecinde tutulan günlük sayesinde görüşme içeriklerinin yanısıra araştırma ortamı ve katılımcılara dair

gözlemler de not edilmiştir. Bu gözlemler veri yorumlanması sırasında kullanılmıştır. Öte yandan, izinleri olduğu sürece katılımcıların fotoğrafları da görsel malzeme olarak toplanmıştır.

- 2- DOKÜMANLAR: Kitaplar, mizah dergileri, ve katılımcılar ile daha önce gerçekleştirilmiş röportajları içermektedir. Araştırmacının konu hakkındaki altyapısını güçlendirmek ve görüşme sorularının hazırlanmasına katkıda bulunmak amacıyla bu belgelerden faydalanılmıştır.
- 3- GÖRSEL MALZEMELER: Mizahçının üretim tarzını ve içeriğini anlayabilmek amacıyla fotoğraf, film, tiyatro, televizyon ve internet üzerindeki diğer görsel malzemelerden yararlanılmıştır.
- 4- GÖRÜŞMELER: Bu tez çalışmasının ana veri kaynağını oluşturmuştur. Görüşme sürecine ilişkin detaylı bilgiye aşağıda yer verilmektedir:

Görüşmeler ortalama 1.5 saat sürmüştür. Yüz yüze yapılan görüşmeler ses kayıt cihazıyla kaydedilmiştir. E-posta yoluyla gönderilen görüşmeler halihazırda metin formunda edinilmiştir. Kaydedilen görüşmeler bu konuda hizmet veren bir profesyonel tarafından deşifre edilmiştir. Deşifre edilen metinler üzerinden, mizahın sosyal rolü kapsamında dile getirilen ana temalar tespit edilmiştir. Aynı zamanda, temel mizah teorilerinde ele alınan tanımlar, kavramlar ve fikirlerle bağlantılı olan veriler belirlenmiştir. Saha çalışması, katılımcıların soruları herhangi bir tesir altında kalmadan yanıtlayabilmeleri için olabildiğince açık bir zihinle yürütülmüştür.

Mülakat soruları. Mizah teorilerinde yer verilen kavramsal çerçeve ve temel

önergeler akılda bulundurulmakla beraber, soruların yanlı veya yönlendirici olmaması için özen gösterilmiştir. Sorular, mizahçıların araştırmacıyla olan diyalogları esnasında, deneyimlerini özgürce anlamlandırabilmeleri için alan yaratmak niyetiyle mümkün olduğunca genel içerikli ve geniş kapsamlı biçimlendirilmiştir. Sosyal yapısalcılık yaklaşımının varsayımlarından hareketle (Creswell, 2003, p.8), araştırma tasarımı açık uçlu sorular üzerine kurulmuş ve katılan mizahçıların sözleri dikkatle kaydedilmiştir.

Araştırma esnasında, katılımcıların öznel anlam inşa süreçlerinin sosyal ve tarihsel bir arka plan içinde, kültürel normlardan etkilenip müzakere edilerek kurulduğu bilgisini akılda tutmuştur. Sonuç olarak, katılımcıların heterojen yapısı, sahadan gelen verilerin yorumlanmasında göz önünde bulundurulmuştur. Özgül mecraları, mizah ürettikleri dönemler ve yaşayıp çalıştıkları ortamların anlatıları üzerindeki olası etkileri de dikkate alınmıştır.

Sahadan toplanan veriler, analizin yönünü belirlemede en önemli unsuru teşkil etmiştir. Tezdeki eğilim ve temaların belirlenmesinde en can alıcı öge olan görüşmeler, aynı zamanda anlatıların daha geniş sosyal ve tarihsel arka plandaki yerini sorgulamak açısından bu çalışmanın en önemli boyutlarından birini oluşturmuştur. Katılımcıların anlatılarına hem öznel üretim koşullarının ve mecralarının, hem de tarihsel arka plan ve dönemin ruhunun nasıl yansıdığını anlamaya çalışmak zorlayıcı olduğu kadar zevkli bir çaba gerektirmiştir.

Amacım, katılımcıların Türkiye’de mizahın sosyal rolü üzerine kurdukları anlatıları yorumlamak olduğundan, önden bir teorik yaklaşım benimsemek

yerine tümevarım yöntemiyle bir anlam izleği oluşturmayı amaçladım. Ancak verileri gruplandırarak teorideki temel kavram ve fikirlerle bağlantısını kurduktan sonra hangi mizah teorilerinin Türkiye bağlamında farklı nesil ve mecralardan mizahçıların anlatılarında görünür olduğunu tespit edebildim. Saha çalışmasında derlenen verilerin ekonomik, sosyal ve kültürel hayattaki nesnel verilerle olan bağlantılarının yorumlanması, bu tezin sosyoloji alanına önemli bir katkısını oluşturmaktadır.

2.3. VERİ ANALİZİ VE YORUMLANMASI

Sahadan alınan verilerin analiz ve yorumlanmasında aşağıdaki adımlar izlenmiştir (Creswell, 2003: 191):

ADIM 1- Verilerin analiz için hazırlanması ve organize edilmesi. Görüşmeler yapıldıktan sonra, ses kayıtlarının deşifre edilebilmesi için bu konuda hizmet veren bir profesyonelden yardım alınmıştır. O esnada saha günlüğü ve notları farklı veri türlerine ve bilgilere göre düzenlenmiştir.

ADIM 2- Tüm verilerin okunması. Deşifre edilmiş görüşme metinleri detaylı olarak okunmuştur. Saha notlarına paralel olarak görüşmelerin okunmasının amacı, katılımcıların Türkiye’de mizahın sosyal rolüne ilişkin algıları, motivasyonları ve fikirleri hakkında genel bir izlenim edinmektir. Bu adım, katılımcıların anlatılarının genel anlamı üzerine düşünmemi kolaylaştırmıştır.

ADIM 3- Kodlama yöntemi ile detaylı analiz: “materyali parçalarına bölerek, o parçaları anlamlandırmak”(Creswell, 2003: 192). Daha detaylı okumalarda

mülakatlarda ortaya çıkan, mizahın sosyal rolüne ilişkin anahtar kelime ve kavramlar listelenmiştir. Anlatı bütününden devşirilen bu anahtar kavramlardan, bu tezin temel eğilim ve savlarını belirlemekte faydalanılmıştır.

ADIM 4- Kodlama sürecinin hem ortam ve katılımcılar, hem de analiz kategori ve temalarının tanımlanmasında kullanılması. Bu kodlar daha sonra analiz edilecek tema ve kategori başlıklarını oluşturmuş ve bu tezin bulgular bölümünde yer verilmiştir. Araştırmaya katılan mizahçıların farklı bakış açılarını yansıtmakta ve çeşitli alıntı ve özgül bulgularla desteklenmektedir. Temaların aynı zamanda hikâyesel bir anlatı içinde birbirleriyle bağlantılarını göstermek amaçlanmıştır. Örneğin, Gezi Parkı direnişi “zekayla kendini savunma aracı olarak mizah” adlı ikinci temayı açıklamak üzere bir arka plan periyodu olarak kullanılmıştır. Tezde ayrıca mizahçılardan yapılan alıntılarla, farklı tema ve alt temaların birbirleriyle nasıl bağlantılı olduğu tartışılmaktadır.

2.5. ANAHTAR KAVRAMLARIN OPERASYONEL HALE GETİRİLMESİ

Önceki bölümde belirtildiği gibi mülakatların okunmasından; “mizahın sosyal rolü” araştırma sorusu çevresinde dönen sözler, terimler ve önermeler bir araya getirilmiştir. Aynı zamanda, bu kapsamda ne gibi önermelerin özellikle tartışma dışı bırakıldığı hususu da göz önünde bulundurulmuştur. İlk aşamada görüşmelerde tespit edilen anahtar kelimeler ve kavramlar bir araya getirilerek aralarındaki bağlar deşifre edilmiştir. İkinci aşamada da arka plana dair atıflar, yorumlar ve bunun araştırma sorusuna dair algıyı nasıl etkilediği hususu açıklanmaya çalışılmıştır.

Bir örnek vermek gerekirse, anlatılarda öne çıkan temalardan biri olan mizahın muhalif tarafına dair çözümlemelerinde, mizahçılar pek çok farklı, ama birbiriyle ilintili alt kavramdan da bahsettiler. Mizahın muhalif olması gerektiği vurgusu yapılırken değinilen kavramlar arasında; ifade özgürlüğü, oto sansür, ezilenin yanında yer alma, tabular, direniş, korkusuzluk, sağduyu, dogmasız algılayış, sosyal sorumluluk yer almaktadır. Verilerin bu şekilde gruplandırılması da, bulgulardaki temel eğilimleri tespit edebilmeyi kolaylaştırmaktadır. Anlatılardan çıkan sonuçlar da, literatürdeki teoriler çerçevesinde incelenmektedir.

Bu bağlamda, metodoloji bakış açısıyla ortaya çıkan birtakım başka sorular; “belirli bir zaman sürecinde mizahın sosyal rolüne dair ortaya çıkan özgül anlatılar nelerdir?” “bu anlatıların birbirleriyle bağlantıları nelerdir?” ve “bunlar birbirlerinden nasıl ayrılmaktadırlar?” Bir bakıma soru; toplumdaki değişimlerin etkisiyle, mizahçıların mizahın sosyal rolü ve kendileri hakkında nasıl farklı anlatılar ürettiğidir.

Bu çerçevede, tez çalışması için yapılan görüşmelerin zamanlaması da önem arz etmektedir. Mizah konusunda bir doktora tez çalışması yapmaya Gezi Parkı protestolarından altı ay önce karar verdim. Türkiye’nin sosyal ve politik tarihinde belirleyici bir olay olan Gezi Parkı direnişinin düşünce özgürlüğü ve demokrasi konusunda gündeme getirdiği tartışmalarda mizahın yeri çok belirleyici olmuştur. Bu zamanlama kaçınılmaz olarak, gerek mülakat yapılan mizahçıların, gerek araştırmacı olarak benim mizahın sosyal rolüne ilişkin algı ve bakış açılarımızı etkilemiştir.

Bu tez çalışmasının en güçlü taraflarından biri de, neredeyse tüm görüşmelerin yüz yüze yapılması ve araştırmacının ortaya sürülen fikirlerin daha sarıh biçimde anlaşılabilmesi için tamamlayıcı sorular sorulabilmesidir. Yüz yüze görüşme, katılımcıların vücut dili, mimikleri, ses tonlaması gibi hususlara da dikkat edebilmesini sağlamıştır. Araştırma konusu ve amaçları katılımcılara net bir biçimde aktarılarak güven tesis edilmiş, bu da diğer mizahçılara ulaşmayı kolaylaştırmıştır. Mizahçıların sosyal ağının bir parçası olmak, mizah gibi bir kültürel alana dair muazzam bir kavrayış edinme olanağı sağlamıştır.

BULGULAR

Mizahçıların anlatıları kapsamlı bir şekilde analiz edildiğinde mizahın toplumsal rolüne dair dört temel bulgu saptanmıştır. Katılımcıların ifadelerinde genel olarak mizahın toplumsal rolünün birden fazla olduğuna işaret edildiği için, farklı tematik anlatılar arasında çapraz bağlantılardan oluşan karmaşık bir ağ gözlemlenmiştir.

Literatürde mizahın sosyal rolüne ilişkin iki temel yaklaşım bulunmaktadır (Kuipers, 2008). İşlevsel olan ilk yaklaşımda mizah, rahatlama, sosyal kontrol ve sosyal bütünleşme işlevine sahip olarak görülmektedir. İkinci yaklaşım ise çatışma yaklaşımıdır. Buna göre mizah bir silah ve savunma aracıdır; diğer bir ifade ile direnişi ifade eden bir araçtır. Alan çalışmasında ortaya çıkan bulguların genel olarak literatürde çerçevesi çizilen bu işlevlerle uyumlu olduğu saptanmıştır.

Muhalefet, İsyen ve İfade Özgürlüğü Olarak Mizah

Mizahın “toplumdaki muhalif güç” olarak hareket etmesi çalışma boyunca mizahın en çok telaffuz edilen sosyal işlevi olmuştur. 48 mizahçının 27’si bu sosyal rol üzerinde durmuştur. “Sistem eleştirisi”, “direniş ifade etme” “toplumdaki ve iktidar partilerindeki gizli kusurlara işaret etme”, “ezilenlerin yanında olma” ve “isyan” bu rolün altında birleşerek onu tamamlayan alt bulgular olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır. Bu kavramlar büyük ölçüde literatürdeki çatışma yaklaşımı ile uyumaktadır.

Mizah üretimindeki tabu ve oto-sansürün ülkenin değişen politik ve sosyal arka planından nasıl etkilendiği de bu başlık altında sınıflandırılacak diğer hususlar ortaya çıkmıştır. İfade özgürlüğü özellikle sıkı siyasi kontrollerin, yasakların ve baskının olduğu dönemlerde mizahın önemli bir yönü olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu konular etrafında dönen tartışmalar, çoğu katılımcının siyasi baskıyı Türkiye Cumhuriyet tarihinde sürekli var olan bir unsur olarak gördüğüne işaret etmektedir. Her zaman kamusal müzakere ve ifade özgürlüğünü sınırlayan baskıcı dönemler olmuştur. Mizah baskıcı eğilime karşı mücadelede, otoritelerin söylemini zorlayan güçlü araçlardan biri olarak tarif edilmiştir.

Öte yandan, mizahçıların anlatılarındaki “muhalefet” ve “eleştirel mizah” kavramlarının anlamları da zamanın ekonomik ve sosyal koşullarına göre değişmektedir. 1940’lı ve 1950’li yıllarda doğan ve 1980 darbesinden önce bu alanda üretim yapan katılımcılar, özellikle gündelik siyasi mücadele ve çatışma parametrelerini kullanarak, mizahın daha geleneksel, ortodoks bir izahında bulunmayı tercih etmektedirler.

Söz konusu kuşak mizahçıları kendilerine “toplumu ileri götürme” misyonu biçerken, mizaha toplumun kusurlarını gösteren bir ayna işlevi biçmektedir. Ancak, 1980’lerde doğan ve katılımcılar arasındaki en genç kuşak mizahçılar böyle bir vazife üstlenmekten imtina etmektedirler. Aslında böylesi bir çabanın “öğretici”, “gereksiz” ve “dayatmacı” olacağını belirterek, mizahın sosyal rolünü “sadece insanları güldürmek” olarak tanımlamaktadırlar. Bu bağlamda sonradan gelen kuşağın söylemlerinin yapısı, erken kuşak mizahçılardan büyük ölçüde farklılaşmaktadır. Anlatıların incelenmesinden, görüşmecilerin söylemlerindeki büyük kırılma ortaya çıkmaktadır.

İlginç bir şekilde, arada yer alan grup (1960 ve 1970li yıllarda doğanlar) daha geniş ve esnek bir bakış açış sergilemektedirler. “Eleştirel mizah” kavramını daha kapsamlı bir şekilde gündelik siyaset ile birlikte hayatın her alanı için geçerli olan “herhangi bir dogmadan bağımsız, açık bir zihne sahip olmak” olarak tanımlamaktadırlar. Mizahçıların sosyal zekasına ve topluma yerleşmiş ve değişmez kabul edilen belirli tabuları ve kuralları sorgulama becerisine odaklanmaktadır.

Mizah üretimi anlamında tabular ve sınırlamalar tartışılırken, katılımcılar arasında anlamlandırma ve çözümlemede farklılaşmalar ortaya çıkmaktadır. Birçoğu “vicdan ve sağduyu” ile “otoriteler tarafından uygulanan sansür” arasında bir ayrım yapmaktadırlar. İlkini kişisel bir tercih ve eğilim olarak tanımlarken, ikincisinin maddi açıdan cezalandırılma veya siyasi otoriteler tarafından dava açılması korkusundan kaynaklandığı düşünülmektedir. Görüşme yapılan tek bir mizahçı bile, otoriteler tarafından uygulanan keyfi

bir sınırlama olarak tabir ettikleri otosansür uyguladıklarını kabul etmemiştir. Ancak, yine ilginçtir ki, yapılan söyleşiler yakından incelendiğinde çalışmalarında kendi kendilerine uyguladıkları sansüre dair izler mevcuttur.

Diğer yandan, bulgular görüşmeye katılan mizahçıların çoğunun “sağduyunun” yazılı olmayan gerekliliklerini tartışmadıklarına ve sorgulamadıklarına işaret etmektedir. Mizahçıların neredeyse tamamı çocuk pedagojisi, nefret dili ve engellilik gibi “vicdan”lı olmanın getirdiği sınırlamaların gözetilmesi konusunda hem fikirdirler. Genel olarak, şaka yaparken birinin “vicdanına ve sağduyusuna” hitap ediyor olmak saygıyı hak etmektedir. Diğer yandan, bazı mizahçılar “sağduyu”yu daha geniş bir şekilde tanımlayarak, din, seks ve hatta zaman zaman politikayı da bu tanımın içine almaktadırlar.

Esprili Bir Savunma Aracı Olarak Mizah

Mizahın en sık bahsedilen ikinci rolü ise *“duygu ve düşüncelerin esprili bir tavırla ifade edilmesi”* ve *“sert hakaretlerle baş etmek ve kendini savunmak için iyi tasarlanmış bir araç”* olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır. Yüz yüze yapılan görüşmelerde, katılımcıları %35’i (17 katılımcı) bu işlevin Türkiye için önemini ifade etmişlerdir. Bu başlık altında özetlenebilecek diğer alt başlıklar ise *“emniyet supabı olarak mizah”*, *“nihayet bir başkası tarafından kaygılarının dile getirilmesinden kaynaklanan rahatlık ve coşku”*, hatta neredeyse *“öç alma”* duygusu şeklinde özetlenebilir. Söylemlerde birbirine yakınlaşan bu alt başlıkların tamamı, mizahı rahatlama hissi ve böylelikle sosyal kontrolü sağlayarak *“baskının dışavurumu”* perspektifinden gören

işlevsel yaklaşımla bir benzerliğe işaret etmektedir.

Kendini ifade ederken daha esprili ve daha az öğretici bir mizah dilinin kullanımında belirli ekonomik, sosyal ve kültürel gelişmeler etkili olmuştur. Giderek artan neo-liberal politikaların, teknolojik gelişmelerin, tüketim kültürünün yükselişinin ve renkli medyadaki reklamlar ve kitle kültürü yoluyla pompalanan bireyselliğin damgasını vurduğu 1980 devlet darbesi sonrası atmosferinde yeni bir orta sınıf ortaya çıkmıştır. Çoğunlukla hizmet, bankacılık, finans ve reklam sektörlerinde çalışan bu sınıf yeni bir şehir kültürünün oluşmasına katkıda bulunmuştur. Bu “biz” kavramının yıkılmasına ve eski komşuluk anlayışının ve çevrenin çözülmesine yol açmıştır. Beyaz yakalı bu yeni orta sınıf kendini geleneksel orta sınıflardan farklılaştıran bir söyleme sahipti. 1990ların sonundan itibaren, mizah dergilerinin yeni tüketicileri olan daha genç, iyi eğitilmiş, kentli orta sınıf bir kitleye hitap eden ve esprili bir düşünce gücüne dayanan daha komik ve aynı zamanda daha az öğretici bir mizah tarzı başarı yakalamaya başladı.

1960lardan sonra doğmuş olan katılımcılar söylemlerinde genellikle mizahi dilin “esprili ifade” boyutuna odaklanmaktadırlar. Politik sloganların veya geçmişin kolaylıkla anlaşılan şablonları yerine, farklı bir kitleye hitap eden yeni bir dil formüle edilmişti. Bu yeni dönemde, politik sloganlardan arındırılmış bir mizah üretebilmek için kalıp yargılara ve klişelere giderek daha az değer verilmişti. Karikatürist Selçuk Erdem’e göre her olayın arkasında karanlık ve kötücül kişilerin tasviri gibi, siyah ve beyaz basmakalıp imajlar ve basit betimlemeler bu dönemde rağbet görmemektedir.

Mizaha atfedilen, “şiddetli saldırılar ve baskılara karşı kendini savunmak için zekice bir araç” rolü, aynı zamanda 1980li yılların ortalarında doğan ve karikatür dergisi, sosyal medya, radyo gibi farklı alanlarda çalışan daha genç bir mizahçı kuşağı arasında da kabul görmektedir. Bu bağlamda, mizahın eleştirel ve kişinin kendi savunma aracı olarak hizmet etme biçiminde, “doğasında var” olarak tarif edilen misyonunun aynı kaldığı görülmektedir. Ancak, bu sosyal role hizmet etmek için kullanılan dil ve tarz dönemlerin ruhuna göre farklılaşmaktadır.

Terapi, Umut ve Hayatta Kalma Yolu Olarak Mizah

Bu çalışma kapsamında mizahçıların söylemlerinde mizaha en sık atfedilen üçüncü rol, mizahın Türk toplumunda “bir antidepresan ve terapi mekanizması” olmasıdır. Bu ifadeye yakınlaşan ve ortak öğeler içeren bir diğer başlık ise *dünyaya başka bir bakış açısı, yeni bir nefes yaratarak güç, umut ve devam etme hissi* veriyor olmasıdır. Bu başlık, toplumdaki kızgınlığı yatıştırma ve dönüştürme, böylelikle bir sosyal kontrol mekanizması olarak hareket etme yönüne odaklanan işlevsel bakış açısı ile uyushmaktadır. Çalışmaya katılan mizahçılardan 15 tanesi bu sosyal rol üzerinde durmuşlardır.

Çalışmada yer alan karikatür sanatçılarından Bahadır Baruter tarafından kısa ve öz biçimde özetlendiği gibi, güçlünün zayıfı ezdiği bir toplumda ailelerdeki, eğitim sistemindeki ve politikadaki demokrasi eksikliği mizahın bir “antidepresan” işlevi gördüğü bir ortam yaratmaktadır. Bu zor sosyal koşullar ve “dışarıdaki kirli dünya” mizahi bakış açısı aracılığıyla

düzeltilmektedir. Dolayısıyla, insanların kendi gerçekleriyle yüzleştği bir terapi ortamı yaratılmaktadır. Yine Bahadır Baruter'in ifade ettiği gibi "bir yandan burası çok kötü bir ülke; hiçbir zaman İsveç olmayacak. Ama diğer yandan da çok güzel, çok şükür ki, hiçbir zaman İsveç olamayacak!"

Baruter sadece Latin Amerika'nın Türkiye'ninkine benzer bir karikatür dergisi kültürü olduğunu belirtmektedir. Bunu "bizim gibi tonlarca tabu ile uğraşan zavallı bir yer" olduğunu söyleyerek açıklamaktadır. Bu ifade aslında, ilk tema olan mizahın eleştirel ve tabuları kırmada yönündeki sosyal işlevi ile benzeşmektedir. Bu işlevler aynı anda ve bir arada var oldukları için mizaha dair kurulan "ifadeler ağı"nın parçalarıdır. Türkiye'nin "tonlarca tabu ile uğraşan zavallı bir yer" olması (tema 1) mizahın bir terapi aracı, neredeyse bir antidepresan olarak kullanılma potansiyeline (tema 3) işaret ettiği için bu başlıklar Türkiye'yi karşılıklı olarak tanımlama ilişkisi içinde olabilirler.

Görüşülen mizah sanatçıları arasında mizahın zor zamanlarda kızgınlık ve öfke için bir çıkış alanı yaratma ve böylelikle bir panzehir/ağrı kesici sunma ve aynı zamanda daha iyi bir gelecek için umut verme potansiyeline odaklanan bir ifade birliği vardır. Bazıları, insanların gündelik yaşamdaki adaletsizlikleri ve verili düzeni sorgulamalarına yol açarak mizahın değişimi hızlandıracağı ümidiyle kızgınlıklarını ifade etmektedirler. Bu antidepresanın tüketiminin kişiyi değişim için mücadelede daha mı güçlü kıldığı ya da bir hissizleştirme etkisi yaratarak statükoya uymayı mı kolaylaştırdığı başka bir araştırmanın konusu olarak kalmaktadır.

İçe Bakış Yaratan, İletişimi Güçlendiren ve Toplumsal Birliği Sağlayan Bir Unsur Olarak Mizah

Bu son başlığın hem bireysel, hem de sosyal boyutu gerçekleşmektedir. Genellikle mizahın özeleştirici- kendi kendisinin eksikliklerini görebilme olgunluğu- boyutu etrafında dolanan söylemler, mizahın ortak bir dil, “mizah dili” oluşturarak sosyal birliği arttırma rolüne (işlevsel yaklaşım) vurgu yapan ifadeler ile kesişmektedir. *“Mizah yoluyla özeleştirici”* başlığı (11 katılımcı tarafından dile getirilmiştir) *“toleransı ve sosyal iletişimi arttıran bir araç olarak mizah* (8 katılımcı bahsetmiştir) ve *“kendi kitlesi arasında bağlayıcı ortak bir dil ve güçlü bir dayanışma oluşturmayı kolaylaştıran mizah”* (13 katılımcı bu sosyal role vurgu yapmıştır) gibi başlıklar ile bir ifade birliği oluşturmuştur.

Diğer yandan, bir topluluk kültürü ve ortak bir dil oluşturma aynı zamanda belirli grupları dışlayan sınırları da oluşturmaktadır. İki taraflı bir kılıç olarak mizah, topluluk dışındakilerle olan çelişkilere ve farklılıklara vurgu yaparken, topluluk üyeleri arasındaki birlik duygusunu güçlendirebilmektedir. Bu nedenle, sosyal bütünlüğü ve toleransı arttırıp arttırmadığı ya da belirli gruplar arasında kutuplaşmalara yol açarak üstünlük duygularını perçinleyip perçinlemediği muğlaktır.

Dışlama, çoğu zaman, söylemlerde her kim iktidarda ise onun baskıcılığının hedef alınmasına karşılık gelir ve bu nedenle “muhalefet” ve “direniş” fonksiyonları ile yakın ilişki içindedir. Yan yana konulduklarında, fonksiyonel (sosyal bütünlük yönü) yaklaşım ve çatışma (direniş, muhalefet) yaklaşımı aynı anda var olabilmektedir.

Bu bağlamda sosyal bütünlük aslında nüfusun benzer değerleri ve özlemleri içeren bir parçasını ifade eder. Mizah yolu ile kurdukları bağ, çoğu zaman güç sahiplerinin baskıcı politikalarını eleştiren bir araç olur. Söylemler incelendiğinde, mizahçıların kendilerini entelektüel açıdan daha üstün gördükleri, kullandıkları esprili dil ve sembollerden anlaşılmaktadır (tema 2). Ancak, gerçek politika üretimi sürecinde yeterli sese sahip değillerdir, bu nedenle mizahı bu eksiliği telafi etmek için kullanmaktadırlar.

Bu başlıklar etrafındaki tartışmalardaki diğer bir konu değişen teknoloji ile artan bireyselliğe ve bunların bağlayıcı bir mizah dili aracılığıyla yaratılan topluluk kültürünü nasıl etkilediğine odaklanmaktadır. Karikatürcüler ile onları takip eden kitleler arasında görünmez bir bağın olduğu özellikle karikatür sanatçılarının söylemlerinde birden fazla kez ifade edilmiştir. Karikatür dergileri, 1970lerden beri Gırgır ekolüyle başlayıp muhtelif dergilerle devam eden bir kültür oluşturmuştur. Bu dergiler, benzer şekilde düşündürerek ve hissettirerek bir arkadaşlık duygusu yaratma işlevi görmüşlerdir. Daha derin bir düzeyde bu başlık, mizahın “*duyguların ve düşüncelerin esprili bir dil ile ifade edilmesi*” (başlık 2) rolü ile de ilişkilidir. Bu bağlamda karikatür dergileri, takipçilerden, kendilerini arkadaş olarak kucaklayan bir kitleden ve hatta dostlardan oluşan, hayranlık ve dayanışmayı da içeren duygular karışımına sahip ortak bir topluluk yaratmıştır.

İletişim teknolojisindeki ve bilgi yayma araçlarındaki yenilikler ile giderek artan bireyselliğin etkileri bu başlığı tartışılırken ayrı konular olarak

gündeme getirilmiştir. Bazı mizahçılar komünal dergi kültürüne değer verirken, diğerleri mizahın bireyselleşmesinin getirilerine daha fazla vurgu yapmaktadır. Dergide çalışan karikatürcülerin en nihayetinde adeta devlet memuru zihniyetine büründüğünü ve bunun heves ve heyecanlarını kaybetmelerine neden olacağını belirtmektedirler. Mizahın birleştirici dili aracılığıyla yaratılan topluluk kültürünün, daha geniş, heterojen bir yapıya sahip bir kitleden ve artan bireysellik trendinden nasıl etkileneceği ucu açık bir konudur.

Bu bağlamda, Gezi protestoları anlatıların çoğunu etkileyen önemli bir kırılma noktası olmuştur. Mizahçılar, Gezi protestolarına mizahın antidepresan niteliği açısından, Türkiye’deki kullanımında bir dönüştürücü gözüyle bakmaktadırlar. Mizahın burada toplumsal bir güvenlik supabı olarak kritik bir role büründüğünü belirtmişlerdir.

İletişim teknolojilerinde ve sosyal medyada kaydedilen gelişmeler, protestolar esnasında da yeni mizah tarzları ve ürünlerinin ortaya çıkması için benzersiz ortam ve fırsatlar yaratmıştır. Bu yeni araçlar, sokaklarda üretilen esprili politik mizahın, evlerinde sosyal medya üzerinden olan biteni takip edenlere yayılmasında etkili olmuştur. Vedat Özdemiroğlu’nun sözleri ile, “eğer sokaklar bir mizah dergisi olursa”, bu durum mizahçıların, özellikle de karikatüristlerin kendilerinin ve mizahın toplumdaki rolünü nasıl değerlendirdikleri üzerinde kaçınılmaz olarak bir etki doğurmuştur.

Bazı katılımcılar, Gezi protestolarının Türkiye’deki on yıllardır var olan mizah dergisi kültüründen esinlendiğini iddia etmektedirler. Diğerleri,

sokaklardan doğan bireysel zekayı överek, mizahın kişisel yanına odaklanmaktadır. Eğlenceli ve heyecan verici olduğu kadar, bu süreç ve ortaya çıkan çok sayıdaki genç ve parlak fikir ile rekabete ayak uydurmak mizahçılar için zorlayıcı bir durum teşkil etmektedir. Hatta kısa bir anlığına mizah dergilerinin “kitlelerin sesi olma” ve toplumdaki “memnuniyetsizliği ve haksızlıkları ifade etme” misyonunu sorguladıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Sonuç olarak, toplumda meydana gelen her başlıca değişiklikte, mizahçılar takipçilerinin ve geniş anlamda toplumun gözündeki misyonlarını “yeniden düzenlemek” için farklı yollar araştırmaktadırlar.

APPENDIX E: THESIS COPY PERMISSION FORM

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YAZARIN

Soyadı : EĞİLMEZLER BOYLAN

Adı: Melike

Bölümü : Sosyoloji

TEZİN ADI (İngilizce) : Humorists' Narratives On Social Role Of Humor In Turkey In A Historical Perspective

TEZİN TÜRÜ:

1. Tezimin tamamı dünya çapında erişime açılsın ve kaynak gösterilmek şartıyla tezimin bir kısmı veya tamamının fotokopisi alınsın. ☐
2. Tezimin tamamı yalnızca Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi kullancılarının erişimine açılsın. (Bu seçenekle tezinizin fotokopisi ya da elektronik kopyası Kütüphane aracılığı ile ODTÜ dışına dağıtılmayacaktır.) ☐
3. Tezim bir (1) yıla süreyle erişime kapalı olsun. (Bu seçenekle tezinizin fotokopisi ya da elektronik kopyası Kütüphane aracılığı ile ODTÜ dışına dağıtılmayacaktır.) ☐

Yazarın imzası

Tarih