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## INTERPRETING STREET INTERVIEWS ON TURKISH ECONOMY THROUGH NIETZSCHE'S CONCEPT OF RESENTMENT

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### Abstract

Beginning in 2018 and climaxing by the end of 2021, Türkiye's economic problems have been a major issue for the country. Therefore, the street interviews broadcast on YouTube, which attract a lot of attention, have focused on the Turkish economy. They have shown that the vast majority of Turkish citizens complain about the state of the Turkish economy. In contrast to the majority and with similar tendencies, opinions and reactions, some of the interviewees, who identify themselves as coming from low-income groups and supporters of the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP), tend to distort the facts regarding the Turkish economy by not only presenting their own economic conditions as better than they actually are, but also denying the existence of the economic predicament the country is in, even though it is admitted by the state authorities. In response to such a contradiction, this study proposes that it could be explained through the theoretical framework of Nietzsche's concept of resentment focusing on victimization, polarization, revaluation, the blaming of others for failures, and the glorification of suffering, which are both the essential components of resentment and tangible themes in the street interviews. To this end, the development of the Turkish economy and the discourses of the state authorities that trigger resentment are first presented. Then, in order to have first-hand information about the interviews and the interviewees, a semi-structured interview is conducted with Mehmet Koyuncu - the interviewer of a popular YouTube channel called Sade Vatandaş (Ordinary Citizen) - who illustrates the issue by analyzing the interviewees' responses.

**Key Words:** Turkish Economy, Street Interviews on YouTube, Resentment

### Nietzsche'nin Resentment Kavramı Üzerinden Türkiye Ekonomisine İlişkin Sokak Röportajlarının Yorumlanması

#### Öz

Türkiye'de 2018'de başlayıp 2021'in sonunda zirveye ulaşan ekonomik sorunlar ülkenin önemli bir konusu haline gelmiştir. Bu nedenle, YouTube'da yayımlanan ve büyük ilgi gören sokak röportajları Türkiye ekonomisine odaklanmıştır. Bu röportajlar, Türk vatandaşlarının

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çoğunluğunun, ekonomiden şikayetçi olduğunu göstermiştir. Ancak, benzer eğilimler, görüşler ve tepkiler gösteren, düşük gelirli gruplardan olduklarını ve Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP) taraftarı olduklarını bizzat belirten kayda değer sayıda katılımcı, çoğunluğa katılmamakta ve karşı gelmektedir. Bunu yaparken yalnızca kendi ekonomik koşullarını olduğundan daha iyi sunmakla kalmayıp devlet yetkilileri tarafından kabul edilen ülkenin içinde bulunduğu ekonomik problemlerin varlığını reddetmektedir. Çalışma, hem sokak röportajlarında sık sık ve somut bir şekilde görülmesi, hem de ressentiment<sup>1</sup> kavramının temel bileşenleri olması sebebiyle mağduriyet, kutuplaşma, yeniden değerlendirme, başarısızlıklar için başkalarını suçlama ve acıların yüceltilmesi gibi konular üzerine yoğunlaşarak röportajlarda görülen çelişkinin ve gerçeği reddetme eğiliminin, teorik çerçeve olarak, Nietzsche'nin ressentiment kavramı ile açıklanabileceğini önermektedir. Bu amaç doğrultusunda, çalışma öncelikle Türkiye ekonomisinin durumunu ve devlet otoritelerinin ressentiment duygusunu tetikleyen söylemlerini incelemiştir. Sonrasında, hem röportajlar hem de röportaj yapılan kişiler hakkında birinci elden bilgi edinmek amacıyla, Sade Vatandaş adlı popüler bir YouTube kanalının muhabiri olan Mehmet Koyuncu ile yarı yapılandırılmış bir röportaj gerçekleştirilmiş ve röportaj yapılan kişilerin yanıtları analiz edilerek konu örneklendirilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Türkiye Ekonomisi, YouTube Sokak Röportajları, Ressentiment

## Introduction

Since the end of 2018, Türkiye has been going through economic crisis and recession (Orhangazi and Yeldan, 2021: 460). Besides, like many countries across the world, it also had its share from the globally forceful economic troubles that Covid-19 pandemic generated (Açıkgöz & Günay, 2020; Naisbitt et al., 2021). Affected by such a global phenomenon, the economic stress Türkiye has been suffering from has become highly visible and tangible. However, it is neither plausible nor rational to present the pandemic as the sole cause of Türkiye's economic distress. Certainly, the political and economic governance of the country, i.e., the roles and actions of the state authorities could also be regarded as causes of the decline of the Turkish economy as well (Şenses, 2022: 183). As a result of such negative global and intrinsic forces, the economic downfall in Türkiye reached climax after September 2021. Prices for goods and services increased so dramatically that economy has become such a significant subject matter for the citizens of the country. Hence, it was regarded as "the most pressing problem" before the elections of 2023 (Aytaç, 2024: 367).

Due to the dramatic setbacks in the Turkish economy, citizens, as a natural reaction, have turned their attention to it. Everything related to the economy has been discussed in the mass media as well as on social media platforms. The Turkish economy, the measures taken for its recovery, the economic conditions of the citizens, their problems and their expectations from the state authorities were some of the main topics of the street interviews. Economy related street interviews broadcasted on YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter have turned out to be one of the most popular sites where citizens are able to deliver their ideas, complaints, and expectations.

Studies indicate that once their economic conditions are weakened and threatened, citizens, especially low-income groups, reject to status quo (Capelos and Demertzis, 2018: 412). Likewise, street interviews by some of the most followed YouTube channels indicate that the great majority of the interviewees complain about Turkish economy. However, what makes these street interviews interesting is that even though economy has turned out to be one of the most important matters in social life and political sphere, there is a significant number of people (at least 10 % as Mehmet Koyuncu states- one of the most popular street interviewers and the owner of the YouTube channel called Sade Vatandaş (Ordinary Citizen) suggesting that there is not an economy related problem in Türkiye even if they are the ones with low-income as they personally state. Moreover, in the interviews, it could be observed that even if they acknowledge certain economic problems, they elevate and glorify economic suffering and having financial difficulty.

In addition to rejecting their reality, neglecting their circumstances, and reevaluating things, the way they construct their opinions could be regarded as surprising, inconceivable, and aggressive which makes the street interviews more interesting. For sure, differences in the viewpoints of individuals are natural, should be respected, and acknowledged. Thus, in order to abstain from having a subjective approach, the reason why the adjectives surprising, inconceivable, and aggressive are employed should be justified.

It seems surprising for the reason that the ones supporting Turkish economy are, most of the times, from the working class, as it is stated by the participants themselves and by Mr. Koyuncu. Considering their poor economic circumstances and low income, compared to the middle and upper classes, and depending on the fact that it is always the working class that has the highest risk of being adversely affected by an economic distress, they are expected to criticize the status quo of Turkish economy in the first place (Burkhauser, Corinth, and Holtz-Eakin, 2021: 314). What is worse, even though the state authorities admit that Turkish economy goes through tough times, these individuals, in a contradiction with the ones they support, surprisingly defend the way it is, claiming that the economy is as good as it should be finding it satisfactory enough.

It seems inconceivable that these people often resort to things that have nothing to do with the topic in order to justify their opinions. For them, owning smartphones, eating in cafés and restaurants, wearing new clothes or the fact that Turkey has motorways, airports, metro tunnels and municipal hospitals are the most important signs of a strong Turkish economy.

It seems aggressive because once they are objected, they harshly criticize, condemn, swear at, and time to time, even physically attack those who voice their complaints and objections. Moreover, they tend to name their objectors ignorant, traitor, and ungrateful to God.

At this point, it should be emphasized that the ones regarding Turkish economy satisfactory enough, as stated by themselves, are supporters of AKP even though it does not necessarily mean that those who complain about the economy are against the party.

As an Islam-oriented party, AKP has been governing Türkiye since 2002 (Gumuscu, 2024: 372). The former prime minister, currently the president, and also the leader of AKP, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is known for constantly voicing the stigmatization, victimization, and suffering of his supporters. His speeches constantly indicate and emphasize the victimization of Turkish-Muslim identity of

the conservative, religion-oriented citizens in the past by Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi or CHP) and its supporters who acknowledge a secular way of life, modernization, and Westernization (Elçi, 2024; Grigoriadis & Dilek, 2018; Tokdoğan, 2020; Yılmaz, 2017). Accordingly, the supporters of AKP are encouraged to the feeling of resentment which generates a reactionary mood involving anger, hatred, humiliation, wrath, and hatred against those who do not comply with themselves (Tokdoğan, 2020: 388; Yılmaz, 2017: 482). As the supporters of AKP are constantly stimulated about such matters, a sharp distinction, in other words, a polarization between the two groups, as a natural outcome, could be asserted to generate a conflict of us and them while interpreting political matters.

Within this concept, this study focuses on reading media contents of popular street interviews of random citizens' views on the economy at YouTube channels. While the public opinion regarding the deteriorating economic conditions with respect to middle- and low-income groups vary from negative to positive, this study aims to elaborate on the positive views on the economy by these same groups, reflecting a contradiction between their economic standings and their reasoning regarding the positive side of the economy and/or the rationale offered for the negatives. In other words, the purpose of this study is to determine why and how a substantial number of AKP supporters with low income refuse to admit Turkey's economic decline and the economic difficulties they face. This study focuses on Nietzsche's conception of morality and the emotion of resentment to address these problems. Making use of resentment, which is a significant driver of reactionism (Capelos & Demertzis, 2018) and populism (Ferrari, 2021; Kiss, 2021), this study suggests that

- party authorities of AKP constantly guide their supporters to slave morality and encourage them to have the emotion of resentment against those who do not share the same values with them.
- as a result of resentment, those who response positively to Turkish economy experience a strong disagreement and anger against their

objectors.

- their resentment leads them to false consciousness, blindfolds them of their own reality, and makes them express their opinions out of emotion rather than reason.
- even if they acknowledge an economic downfall, they elevate and glorify their troubles presenting them as a value.

In addition, it should be emphasized that the study avoids giving the impression that all interviewees who are from low-income groups and AKP supporters are motivated by resentment. It argues that those who are motivated by resentment deny the existence of economic setbacks even though they are from low-income groups.

Ressentiment in Turkish politics has widely been studied indicating how frequently it is employed by Turkish politicians as well as emphasizing its impact on many issues such as how it appeals to its audience, how it is employed in the campaigns, how the citizens construct their political identities, decide what party to vote, interpret the actions of politicians and so on (Çelik & Balta, 2020; Grigoriadis & Dilek, 2018; Selçuk, 2016; Tokdoğan, 2020; Yılmaz, 2017). Depending on the idea that what matters about emotions is what they do to us -or what they could make us do- rather than merely what they are (Ahmed, 2014), this study aims to contribute to the literature by exploring to what extent resentment is acknowledged and experienced. It examines its reflections and consequences, how it is exercised and projected, and how it shapes the way individuals interpret their social and economic environment, based on the personal statements of its “consumers” in Türkiye, within the framework of the Turkish economy. By doing so, the study intends to point out the impact and power of resentment as it could lead its consumers to deny their own reality.

This study, first, introduces the literature on resentment aiming to point out how it could affect the way of thinking of individuals and interpreting things. Then, as the background information of the study, it presents the economic circumstances

of Türkiye since 2021 indicating the way state authorities have been managing Turkish economy and how the citizens are affected by their regulations. Following that, it focuses on the bombardment of resentment stimulation that AKP supporters are exposed to by the party authorities. Finally, the study aims to justify its assertions through an interview conducted with Mehmet Koyuncu. In addition to that, in order to support and exemplify its claims, the study employs and interprets some of the most viewed street interviews of the channel.

### **1. Nietzschean Slave Morality and Ressentiment**

In his work *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche aims to present how individuals determine their values and morality (1967). He suggests that the concept of 'good' is not about the actor of the deed but about the feeling of the one who is its object. For him, meanings are situated, not general or universal (1979). In other words, knowledge, concepts, or morality are named, grasped, developed, and interpreted depending on the conditions and social relations of individuals at a certain period of time (C. Payne, 1967).

Accordingly, in order to clarify his claims, depending on "pathos of distance" which refers to the psychological and emotional gap separating different classes of people, Nietzsche puts forward two kinds of morality; (i) noble morality; the morality of the noble, powerful, high-stationed and high-minded ones and (ii) slave morality; the morality of the "low-minded, common and plebian" (1967).

Suggesting that the members of these two groups develop and experience their morality depending on their circumstances and social relations, the noble ones, concentrate only on themselves and their way of life, name their actions good. They are positive about their wellbeing, detached from and indifferent to others. They do not need justification for their identification. To put it differently, they identify themselves, name and evaluate their actions, and generate meanings and morals through their own characteristics.

On the other hand, due to their weaknesses, the ones with the slave morality are not able to do so. Feeling oppressed by the powerful, they do not generate their

own morality or assess the value of their actions through their own means but by referring to, negating, and revaluating the values of the noble ones (Reginster, 1997). Such a distinction leads us to the idea that while the noble morality has the potency to name or value things as good or bad, the slave morality could only revalue them. The difference of morality between the two happens to be “one’s sense of self” and “outward” for the former while it is “one’s sense of others” and “inward” for the latter (Strong, 1975: 239-240). Such an emotion is what Nietzsche (1967: 36) calls resentment which is a psychological state in which individuals who feel powerless or oppressed respond to the outside world, especially to the ones with the power through envy, anger, wrath, and especially revenge as they are regarded to be the source of their sufferings.

At the outset, victimhood mentality constitutes a key psychological outcome of resentment. Feeling victimized by the powerful, individuals with resentment feel obliged to blame others for their failures and sufferings (Hoggett, 2018; Rodax et al., 2024). There needs to be someone out there, i.e., “eternal enemies” who is responsible for their impotency (Strong, 1975). In order to justify its shortcomings and weaknesses, the resentment mindset, “paranoid sense of victimization” finds the solution in abstaining from responsibility and projecting them onto others (Ure, 2015: 603).

A mentality of victimhood often sets the stage for a re-evaluation. Triggered by this feeling, individuals with resentment go through a reactionary process (Capelos & Demertzis, 2018; Capelos & Katsanidou, 2018) whose primary motive is envy (Demertzis, 2020; Tenhouten, 2018) leading them to punish, take revenge, and surpass the powerful ones (Berkowitz, 1995) even though, deep down, they desire what nobles have. Yet, they are not able to achieve that. Accordingly, their impotence and inferiority lead them to reconsidering the value of things in a way that they do not evaluate things through their own perceptions but acknowledge them over the noble ones which is why resentment is introduced as a process of revaluation (Fareld, 2016; Salmela and Capelos, 2021), “defensive mechanism”, or

“transvaluation” (Demertzis, 2020: 133). That is, desires that are deeply rooted or unconscious are re-evaluated and transformed into something of lesser value—something undesired or meaningless. Just like the fox in Aesop’s fable who disparages the grapes it fails to reach, the slavish man condemns or belittles noble virtues while elevating his own deformed or inferior ones (Reginster, 1997; Salmela & Capelos, 2021). In this process of re-evaluation, he negates, devalues, falsifies, distorts, and ultimately rejects those virtues (Demertzis, 2020; Hoggett, 2018; Meredith, 2020; Reginster, 1997; Scheler, 1994). It is so influential upon the actions and reactions of the slavish man that it is conceived as “self-poisoning of the mind” (Scheler 1994, 4) for the reason that it leads them to a form of “self-deception” (Berkowitz, 1995; Reginster, 1997).

That being the case, the revaluation of the slavish man brings about reversal of morals. By “promulgating lies” and “falsification of what is higher”, they reverse the meanings of morals (Berkowitz 1995: 77). Their traits are introduced as virtues while the traits of the nobles are given as vices (Owen, 2007). With this “scheme of morality”, their suffering, weakness, poverty, and impotency are glorified and regarded as something of a value while the morality of the nobles are regarded as evil (Berkowitz, 1995: 79).

This act of “the most spiritual revenge” could be interpreted as a way of constructing identity as well (Nietzsche, 1967: 34). This “creative deed” turns out to be saying “no to what is ‘outside’, what is ‘different’, what is not ‘itself’” (Nietzsche, 1967: 36). That way, the slavish man constructs and presents his identity as “the opposite of that by which one is afflicted” (Strong, 1975: 242).

## **2. Methodology**

This study concentrates on the street interviews about Turkish economy by the YouTube channel called Sade Vatandaş. It focuses on the question of why some of the interviewees, who are AKP supporters, describe Turkish economy as satisfactory and do not complain about it even though they are from low-income groups. It aims to explain such a case through Nietzsche’s concept of resentment.

That is, the study suggests that the emotion of resentment which is constantly stimulated by the authorities of AKP could be a meaningful cause for the reason why some AKP supporters prefer to reject, neglect, negate, or disregard the troubles that Turkish economy undergoes and even glorify their sufferings even though the majority of the interviewees and even the state authorities think otherwise.

As this study does not rely on concrete, measurable, or tangible data, but rather on meanings derived from “lives, lived experiences, behaviours, emotions, and feelings” and their interpretation, it adopts a qualitative research design (Corbin and Strauss, 1998). Within this framework, considering that the interviewers have the first-hand information about the interviews, the interviewees, and the way their responses are shaped, as a research method, the study, first, conducted a semi-structured interview with Mehmet Koyuncu, the owner and main interviewer of the YouTube channel *Sade Vatandaş*.

There are many YouTube channels conducting street interviews about current affairs of Türkiye. However, I contacted only three of them which I regard as the most popular and professional ones; Sade Vatandaş, İlave TV, and Kendine Muhabir<sup>1</sup>. As Sade Vatandaş was the only one that responded the request positively, I conducted an interview with Mehmet Koyuncu, a journalist who has been conducting street interviews all over Türkiye since 2019. The interview was conducted online through a Zoom meeting. The interview was semi-structured, tape-recorded, and transcribed verbatim.

In addition to that, in order to support and exemplify the assertions of the study, I also made use of street interviews conducted by Sade Vatandaş only as other channels did not wish to take part within the study. As the methodological frame of this part of data collection, the study employs Video Data Analysis (VDA) which presents how individuals act, react, and respond and enables us to observe what consequences they generate for social outcomes through visual source of information

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<sup>1</sup> Even though I picked three YouTube channels that I regard the most professional and popular ones, in order to have more options regarding the issue see (Aydoğdu & İlhan, 2020).

(Nassauer and Legewie, 2021).

After watching more than 30 hours of street interviews on Turkish economy, the process of video selection was completed as they began to deliver similar messages and generate a pattern. It should be stated that almost each video had and represented characteristics of ressentiment. They were specifically paid attention and checked whether they had reflections of victimhood, rejection, negation, revaluation, and glorification aspects of ressentiment in order for them to meet the needs and characteristics of literature review section.

Then, the videos were classified, labelled, coded, and categorized depending on the theme of ressentiment they deliver. As stated earlier, almost each street interview represented certain characteristics of ressentiment. That being the case, in order to keep the data analysis simple and brief; and to explain the subject matter in hand in an open way, I picked the most meaningful, exemplificative, striking, and straight to the point ones.

Moreover, throughout the data analysis of the article, the videos and the comments of the interviewees are pinpointed to be explained through what characteristics of ressentiment they appeal to. That is, in addition to analyzing only the statements of the interviewees, they were also introduced within the framework of which aspect of ressentiment they match with.

No matter what their answer is, the interviewees are all asked the question of how the economy is. As individuals selected at random, they were numbered in accordance with the way they were cited throughout the text.

The next section, first, presents the recent economic circumstances of Türkiye. Then, through a few, brief but significant examples, it indicates how citizens are encouraged to feel ressentiment by party authorities.

### **3. Economic Circumstances in Türkiye after September 2021**

Even though this study does not have the premise for an economic framework, the latest economic circumstances of Türkiye should briefly be given. Economic downfall in Türkiye started in 2018 with slow-down in economic growth,

downgraded ratings of Türkiye by credit-rating agencies, loss of value of Turkish Lira (TL) against United States Dollar (US\$), acceleration of inflation and unemployment. On top of that, with the arrival of Covid-19 pandemic, in 2020, things turned out to be worsening for the already fragile Turkish economy (Orhangazi & Yeldan, 2021).

Explaining the causes of economic distress in Türkiye after 2021 and concentrating on the last one, Şenses (2022) presents three causes; (i) deep structural problems, (ii) negative developments in the outside world, and (iii) domestic phenomena, the Turkish style presidential regime. Accordingly, by the end of 2021, president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, embellishing it with Islamic references and going against the academic and scientific understanding of economy, reduced the policy rate of Central Bank of Türkiye from 19 per cent down to 14 per cent with his famous statement interest rates are the cause while the inflation is the result.

As stated earlier, according to Turkish Statistical Institute (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu, TÜİK) the annual inflation rate of 2021 was 36.08 per cent higher than the previous year (2022). However, Inflation Research Group (Enflasyon Araştırma Grubu, ENAGrup), which is an independent inflation research organization, declared the same value as 82.81 per cent (2022). As the statistics of independent organizations were much higher than the official ones and as TÜİK had its fifth president since 2016, the public trust for it was undermined.

Furthermore, TL to the US\$, as the exchange rates announced by Turkish Central Bank indicates, increased from 8.30 in the beginning of September 2021 to 17.50 on 20th of December 2021 which is 33.95 as of September 2024 (2021). Following that, in order to make TL attractive, the government-initiated currency-protected term deposit account which encourages individuals to keep their savings in TL promising to compensate depreciation in TL against US\$ with three-month, six-month, and one-year terms. Devaluation of TL and the increase in prices were so strong that in March 2022, the minister of Treasury and Finance, Nureddin Nebati stated that since TL is at its lowest point and it could not go down anymore, the

citizens should feel at ease (HalkTV, 2022).

Moreover, as Türkiye is heavily dependent on imports in terms of energy, prices of energy products have increased drastically (Capik et al., 2013). Thus, the prices of natural gas, gasoline, electricity, and various taxes have increased obtrusively. According to Energy Market Regulatory Board, while the price of gasoline was 7.74 TL per liter in September 2021, it was 21.36 TL in November 2022 which is 41.54 as of September 2024 (Enerji Piyasası Düzenleme Kurumu, 2024).

One of the most important indicators of a deteriorating Turkish economy could be the fact that the unemployment rate moved upwards from 10 to 20 per cent as discouraged workers are included (Kubilay, 2022). In addition, in Türkiye, under normal circumstances, minimum wage is raised annually at the end of every year. However, in order to maintain the purchasing power of citizens against the increasing inflation, in June 2022, the state authorities decided to raise it midyear with 29.3 per cent which made it around 300 US\$ as of November 2022.

With its annihilating force, the downfall in Turkish economy has generated dramatic repercussions and has been experienced in the daily lives of citizens concretely. The prices of things such as housing, vehicles, food, agriculture, building materials, clothing, electronics, etc. have doubled and even tripled. This resulted in citizens' regarding certain commodities as luxurious as they could not afford them and purchasing the ones they consider essential. The circumstances got so dire that people, in cold weather, waited for hours in queues to buy cheaper bread subsidized by municipalities (Şenses, 2022). There were also queues in gas stations especially at late night times in order to abstain from the raise in gas prices that was to come on the following day. It is also indicated that, the rate of the individuals who stated that their economic circumstances worsened was 55.4 while the rate of those who stated that they could not financially support themselves or their families was 57.2 (Aydin et al., 2021).

Furthermore, Türkiye became a cheap market for neighbouring countries

whose currency was much higher compared to depreciated TL. Accordingly, masses of tourists from Greece, Bulgaria, Georgia, and Iran have been visiting the border cities of Türkiye with the aim of purchasing cheaper Turkish goods (Bulunuz & Baykan, 2023).

As a result of all these, the wish to migrate to different countries became so strong that although the number of the applicants for Green Card to the US was 69 thousand in 2007, it was 129 thousand in 2021 (Euronews, 2022).

To sum up, the research named Orientations of Türkiye (Aydin et al., 2021) indicates that although ‘economy’ as an answer to the question ‘what is the most important issue in Türkiye?’ was 6.7% in 2019, it was 22.7 % in 2021. Such a sharp rise could indicate the fact that the economic problems of Türkiye became so tangible that they began to disturb the daily lives of its citizens dramatically.

#### **4. Stimulation of Ressentiment in Turkish Politics**

With the intentional efforts of political actors serving both for the growth of social cleavages and the benefit of their parties, discourse of victimization, internal and external enemies, conflicts between elite groups and ordinary citizens, i.e., populist approach is regarded not only as an “acute symptom” but a “chronic phenomenon” that has been a characteristic of Turkish politics since 1950s (Cinar, 2024). In line with this tradition, the AKP has consistently employed rhetoric saturated with anger, hatred, victimhood, anti-elitism, and polarization, since its rise to power in 2002 (Elçi, 2024; Tokdoğan, 2020). In addition, more than 20 years of success of the party is linked to its claims of victimization (Grigoriadis & Dilek, 2018; Tokdoğan, 2020; Yilmaz, 2017). Hence, this section aims to present a few of many examples that AKP authorities perform in order to stimulate the resentment of the party supporters.

In general, Turkish politics is said to have been shaped through center-periphery relations (Mardin, 1973). While center represents republican, secular, urban, and Western oriented individuals, institutions, and regulations, the periphery stands for religious, conservative, and rural segments of the country. The way the

periphery in Türkiye has regarded itself within the society is interpreted as follows. Even though they are the members of the society, their subjective/individual culture is criticized, distanced, and ignored by the dominant objective culture which is the center. As the center pushes away and excludes the periphery, its individuals turn out to be remote even though they are close. They experience a sense of distance or alienation which is why they regard themselves as the Strangers<sup>2</sup> within the society (Lemert, 2018; Simmel, 2009).

Drawing on this conflict Erdoğan presents himself, his party, and their supporters as strangers within Turkish society, thereby constructing a narrative of victimhood. At this point, his number one enemy to blame seems to be CHP. The polarization between religion-oriented ones and secularist groups, Kemalists, - particularly the CHP- can be regarded as one of the earliest expressions of *ressentiment* in his political claims. That is, Erdoğan consistently emphasizes the victimization of his supporters stating that Kemalists, those who regard themselves as an elite group, have despised, overlooked, and ignored the religious, conservative, and traditional identity. For example, in his group meeting speech in Grand National Assembly of Türkiye, he states that “in our dictionary, there is no arrogance. There is never and never looking down on the folks, building a wall or distancing ourselves from the citizens” (TRT Haber, 2024). In this way, Erdoğan emphasizes the values like inclusivity and empathy as the most significant principles of his party. This statement pictures a sharp contrast to CHP of which he accuses fostering elitism, ignoring, looking down on and alienating segments of the population. Moreover, this statement stands both as a reminder of victimization and humiliation, and a promise of not experiencing it again.

In addition to that, religion has always been a central matter for Erdoğan arguing that those who identify themselves through religion have always been neglected, stigmatized, and victimized. For example, in his speech at the 5th Religious Council, he states that religious people were identified as backwards and even executed asserting that Islam and being devoted to it have always been insulted

under the name of freedom of speech. Those scholars or politicians who defended Islam have been persecuted and even hanged (Daily Sabah, 2014).

Victimization of religious citizens in education system is another matter that is employed in his speeches. The headscarf-ban in universities and taking off the exam points of Imam-Hatip graduates are some of the most important examples of Erdoğan's statements that introduce his supporters as victimized. For example, in a group meeting, he calls out to Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu -the president of CHP between 2010-2023- telling that he should ask for blessing from headscarved women (Anadolu Ajansı, 2021). To him, these regulations stand as a policy of oppression implemented by secular elites against religious citizens and are described as the means to exclude religious citizens and headscarved women from the public sphere.

For Erdoğan, his supporters were victimized in economic sphere as well. To him, capital and economic opportunities were available only for the secular elites while religious and conservative entrepreneurs were excluded and marginalized. Accordingly, he states that “they thought they were the only entitled ones. Thus, they despised our people who wanted to take part in medium and large-scale private sector initiatives and to receive public services” (Anadolu Ajansı, 2022).

Besides the internal enemies, AKP authorities hold on to the discourse of external ones as well. The West and the process of Westernization are also two of the things that have caused troubles for the periphery. To him, the humiliation, exclusion, and victimization of Islam and Muslim identity began with the arrival of Tanzimat reforms which is regarded as the earliest steps to the Westernization and modernization and as the cause of the collapse of religious identity (Tokdoğan, 2020). Moreover, Western countries are also held responsible for the economic troubles Türkiye has been going through. For example, Erdoğan states that

*“A significant part of the economic difficulties we experienced were not economic, but the result of political games being put into practice. Of course, every struggle has its burden. Before the election, we witnessed,*

*once again, an attempt to design the country's politics through the economy” (Sözcü, 2023).*

This argument of his suggests that the economic issues facing Türkiye, such as high inflation, currency devaluation, or unemployment, are not merely the results of domestic mismanagement or market dynamics but are part of a deliberate effort by foreign actors in order to manipulate Turkish economy and influence its internal politics.

Strong (1975: 247) suggests that “the past that will not let a man live in the present is the past of resentment and of slave morality”. Likewise, depending on Strong’s statement, it could be suggested that by emphasizing the victimization, humiliation, insult, neglect, and exclusion they have been exposed to by common, power-holding whether internal or external enemies, Erdoğan intends to stimulate the resentment of his supporters. As a result of shared values and characteristics, and common enemies, there occurs a collective identity or an imagined community<sup>3</sup> where individuals unite and act through an emotional bond that transcends rational consideration (Anderson, 2006). In other words, there occurs a collective emotion which enables individuals to belong to a certain group, directs them to perceive and interpret things as a union, and push them to act together, sometimes without deep rationalization (Ahmed, 2014). That being the case, the supporters of AKP could be expected to react to things through the way their resentment leads them to.

## **5. Exercising Ressentiment through Street Interviews on Turkish Economy**

Emotions are so closely related to and intertwined with politics that they are regarded as its inescapable ingredients. Playing a crucial role in shaping our political beliefs, preferences, decisions, and interpretations, it could be suggested that they are not just fleeting reactions but often serve as powerful forces (Ottati, 2001). Our identity, the group we identify with, our background and past experiences, and the emotions they all trigger have an impact upon the way we evaluate and make

judgements about politics (Marcus, 2000). Accordingly, emotions play a significant role upon deciding where individuals camp themselves in politics. Likewise, emotions could be regarded as one of many factors creating polarization in politics. Hence, the street interviews on Turkish economy could be given as an exemplification of political polarization in Türkiye for the reason that participants seem to be making their political interpretations out of their emotions which are triggered by their group identities and past experiences. That is, while explaining how their emotions control the interviewees' political opinions and on what political camp they place themselves, Mr. Koyuncu states that

*“I will give you a very interesting example. Just the other day, two AKP supporters were discussing about Turkish economy. One of them misunderstood the other one thinking that he had complaints about the economy. He did not even listen to what the other one said and called him dishonest and traitor just because he thought that the other one regarded Turkish economy bad. Then, the first one did the same calling him dishonest and traitor. Then, the audience told them that they were on the same page that they were both AKP supporters. They asked each other if they supported AKP. Having the responses yes, they had peace. In brief, there was no room for rationality but it was all about their emotions”* (personal interview).

Mr. Koyuncu provides us with a simple example of polarization in Turkish politics. Being bombarded by AKP authorities with the discourse of us vs. them, in an extremely polarized political atmosphere where “civility in public discourse” and “prospects for an inclusive democratic debate” has diminished (Yurdakul, 2020), what matters for both of these AKP supporters is not what their opinions are or how they explain and defend their arguments but whether he is one of us or not. In other words, not sharing the same opinion is a cause that is good enough for individuals to name their objectors traitor and dishonest, i.e., them.

As a forceful emotion that is able to shape the way individuals perceive and

interpret things, especially politics in this case, resentment requires its other. In other words, in order to exist or to identify itself, it needs its opposition. For polarization which is a basic need of resentment, Mr. Koyuncu regards politicians and their speeches as the fundamental cause about which he asserts

*“Because of the discourses of the politicians, there is a great opposition within the society. Polarization and otherization are beyond description. It leads individuals to insult each other or even to engage in violence. If they could, they would even shoot each other”* (personal interview).

Mr. Koyuncu informs us that the language that the state authorities use, the messages they deliver, and the emotions they trigger fuel the opposition between political camps. They function in such a forceful way that they prevent people from engaging with facts or opposing views, reducing the space for nuanced political discourse. Depending on what the politicians say, believing, and trusting them, their supporters are given an opposition to identify themselves with. However, this identification does not operate through the values they are supposed to have but through the ones they are supposed not to have. The values or the characteristics the other have should be opposed, negated, abstained from, and revalued. That being the case, this dynamic erodes democratic debate as emotions dominate reasoning, and political opponents are seen not just as wrong but as enemies.

Depending on the responses of the interviewees who do not complain about the way Turkish economy is, resentment could easily be observed as they focus on two different eternal enemies; i) external forces and ii) CHP, both of which are regarded as the ultimate cause of failure in political or economic spheres.

In an interview, interviewee 1, who claims to be having difficulty in living by as he is a worker and a tenant, states that “problems in economy are caused by external forces. It is a play of America and Israel. It is all because of them. They worry only about how to destroy Türkiye” (Sade Vatandaş, 2022a).

In another one, for the cause of high prices, interviewee 2 expresses that

*“America sends its men to buy the products whose prices they want to raise and to collect the dollar which is how their prices increase. We will fight, we will not surrender. If we fall into this play, Türkiye will be worse than Libya and Iraq. There are so many games played out in the world against Türkiye” (Sade Vatandaş, 2024a).*

Even though the study presents only two examples here, it should be emphasized that a great number of similar interviews with similar messages are available and could easily be found not only in the videos of Sade Vatandaş but in many other YouTube channels and other social media platforms conducting street interviews on Turkish economy. Here, with their “unverified claims” which “is not the most plausible account of an event” and “sensationalistic subject matters or implications” which are “epistemically self-insulating against disconfirmation”, what they state seems to be going no further than being a conspiracy (Brotherton, 2013: 9). However, it is possible to observe how they exercise the emotion of resentment as both of the interviewees accuse not the state authorities but external forces. That is, the very first cause they emphasize is victimization. They believe that AKP authorities, even though they are the ruling power of the country, have no responsibility in the failures on the Turkish economy. They are victimized by much more powerful external forces. Their impotency, shortcomings, and failures are explained, justified, and projected onto others in such a way that it leaves no room for neither the party authorities nor the party supporters to have any responsibility.

Summing up the assumption of victimization by external forces, Mr. Koyuncu informs us

*“People believe that Türkiye is having a great war against the world, other countries do not want us to exist. If they could, they would immediately destroy us. Thus, we defy the whole world, we do not acknowledge the pressure we are exposed to which is why we are having such economic difficulties” (personal interview).*

In addition to the external forces causing troubles for Türkiye, in the street

interviews, we also observe an internal one; CHP. That is, along with the external forces, the interviewees present CHP as the cause of their victimization and the economic troubles. Interviewee 3 answers to the question how the Turkish economy is as follows.

*“If I feel like I should vote for CHP, I will betray my past and background. So, I cannot vote for CHP. If I had a dream in which I vote for CHP, I would renew my ablution<sup>4</sup>. My conservative identity stops me from voting for CHP. Ever and never. We very well know that they banned adhan, Quran, and performing prayer, changed mosques to barns and amusement centers, assigned watchman at the doors of our grandparents while they were performing prayers, imprisoned them when they Quran in Arabic” (Sade Vatandaş, 2024b).*

His response does not include or cover anything related to the economy. Even though he is asked about the economic circumstances, he disregards them and concentrates on blaming CHP for his victimization which is quite different from the previous ones as his victimization is a sense of identity-based one tied to historical and religious narratives. He regards CHP as a threat to his religious and cultural identity. The emotional weight of his belief seems to be palpable, as he equates voting for the CHP with betraying his core values, heritage, and even religiosity. Hence, it could be suggested that his resentment prevents him from concentrating on and answering the question thoroughly within the framework of economy leading him to disregard economic problems. To him, economic problems could be ignored and should not be paid attention to as they are more tolerable than being governed by CHP.

Emphasizing how successful and effective polarization operates, Mr. Koyuncu argues

*“When football teams lose three or four matches in a row, their fans in the stadium call out asking for the resignation of the team management. What I observe through my interviews is that in this country, supporting*

*a political party is more fanatic than supporting a football team. No matter what the party does, its supporters do not want their leader to change”* (personal interview).

That being the case, it could be asserted that instead of acknowledging or owning the shortcomings and failures, they prefer to channel them into a moral condemnation, to project these dissatisfactions onto others and to regard them as the cause. In other words, instead of confronting their own role in their misfortunes, the interviewees attribute them to an external agent. Such an approach operates as a useless defense mechanism enabling the individual with resentment an escape from responsibility and leading him to avoid introspection or personal accountability as it paralyzes and stops him from taking actions instead of focusing on how to improve his conditions.

In general, resentment based polarization and the hatred against the others are so forceful that resentful AKP supporters tend to present their victimization as a cause of the economic problems of the country. In addition to that, their victimization is regarded as such a considerably significant subject matter that it is prioritized surpassing the economic problems and regarded as more tolerable than the others.

Following victimization, there comes the revaluation phase of the interviewees for the purpose of justifying the failures in the economy. That is, as Scheler (1994) asserts, they poison their own mind because even though they know that they disdain, negate, or undervalue certain things or values in an unreasonable way. Depending on this assertion, it could be suggested that resentful interviewees tend to do that purposely in order to disregard the economic troubles and to justify their views and the political authorities they support. About revaluation phase Mr. Koyuncu argues that “there is a society which denies the existing reality”.

In an interview, when Mr. Koyuncu asks Interviewee 4 whether he is satisfied with the current state of the economy, he responds as follows.

*“I am happy with the economy. It is easy to live on. If you buy whatever you see, do not know how to spend your money, do the things you like to*

*do, do not spend your money like a Muslim, then economy is bad. If you buy the things you need, if you do not follow people and act like a wannabe, if you spend your money like Muslims should do, then economy is good. (Showing the jacket his wearing) See, it is Altinyıldız<sup>5</sup>. I found it in the garbage. If economy was bad, I would not find it in the garbage”* (Sade Vatandaş, 2022b).

Depending on what the interviewee 4 states, it could be asserted that he reevaluates and redefines things in order to cope with certain disadvantages. He explicitly opposes being able to buy or do what one likes, negates them regarding them as an irresponsible act of waste of money. He elevates and redefines economic restraint as a moral achievement that a Muslim should follow rather than a limitation imposed by economic hardship. Meanwhile, he does not question or worry about his poor economic circumstance which requires him to scavenge in the garbage. However, with his redefinition and revaluation, he presents it as a merit of being frugal and a sign of a good economy. Moreover, by stating that people tend to act like others and be a part of consumerism with their desire to purchase things like the ones who are able to, he reframes consumerist lifestyle as unfavourable and reflects it as a reversal in which what he lacks is regarded as undesired or less valuable. In brief, the interviewee's response stands both as the revaluation and glorification phase of ressentiment as he transforms the experienced and obvious economic limitations into a narrative of moral and practical superiority.

In another one, Mr. Koyuncu asks how the economy is by emphasizing that even the president acknowledged the economic problems and high prices in Türkiye. As a response to this, interviewee 5 states that

*“All the countries have high prices, not only Türkiye. In Türkiye, everything is sweetness and light. Resorts, gas stations are full. Nobody is hungry. We remember the times of Ecevi<sup>6</sup>. Soldiers and police had to sell lemon to make money. Schools and hospitals were awful. Bagel is 10 liras. I eat bagel and I do not question that. We could not build a mosque*

*in Taksim. No one else could open Hagia Sophia. Love your country”*  
(Sade Vatandaş, 2024c).

The interviewee dismisses economic problems in Türkiye, which are admitted by the president himself, by suggesting that it is a world-wide experience. This act of reframing minimizes the specific impact of economic hardships in Türkiye through relativizing it to a global context. He is able to lessen their emotional weight by using this analogy to lessen the impact of local issues and turn them into something inevitable and universally shared. Besides, as he refers to the past comparing it to the present, he reframes the latter as favourable instead of aspiring for an ideal present or future. Furthermore, by regarding going to resorts or gas stations as an undesired or unnecessary act, he creates a reframed image of abundance and economic satisfaction, countering and dismissing narratives of economic struggle as well as presenting being able to purchase a bagel as a sign of merit, strength, and contentment. What is more, talking within the framework of religion and nationalism, he elevates and presents them as a matter of much more significance which allows him to reevaluate economic concerns and anxiety.

As Berkowitz (1995) informs us, through “scheme of morality”, the weakness, suffering, impotency, and poverty of resentment is elevated, glorified, and regarded as a moral. That is, resentment leads individuals to present things like suffering or sacrifice as elevated and glorified virtues which is how it enables them a sense of dignity and worth that it lacks in the first place. About the glorification phase, Mr. Koyuncu asserts that

*“Those interviewees believe that the economic troubles they suffer from are holy. They regard their troubles as if they are a way of religious practice. They believe that the poverty they suffer from, sacralization of their way of life, and regarding it as a religious trial all enable them a political stand which allow the country to remain powerful”* (personal interview).

As Mr. Koyuncu explains the interviewees tend to glorify their

circumstances. This glorification phase of resentment enables them to acknowledge their economic troubles not as poverty or impotency but a meaningful and even a holy state. In other words, sufferings are glorified to be a badge of morality. That is, operating as a coping mechanism, besides dissuading them from facing and dealing with their problems, it gives them the sensation to be serving for a higher moral purpose. In addition to that, it also stands as an extremely strong type of virtue imbuing them the idea that the more they acknowledge it, the more they serve their country.

## **6. Conclusion**

Türkiye has been dealing with serious economic troubles which have concrete negative impacts upon the daily lives of citizens. Accordingly, many YouTube channels employ economy as the subject matter of their interviews. Not only on Sade Vatandaş but also on many other YouTube channels, street interviews indicate that a great majority of the interviewees, regardless of their political views, complain about the way Turkish economy is. However, with their similar statements, opinions, and reactions, there also seems to be a group of AKP supporters who deny the existence of such problems even though they are expected to be the first ones to experience economic distress as they are the ones from the working class (Capelos & Demertzis, 2018b; Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2013; Semyonov et al., 2004). Then, the question what makes them do so remains meaningful.

Bearing in mind the highly polarized political atmosphere of Türkiye, which is shaped between those with republican, secular, urban, and Western values and those with religious, conservative, and rural ones segments of the country (Mardin, 1973), and depending on the fact that AKP supporters, who are affiliated with the latter one, have continuously been exposed to certain discourses which stimulate their emotion of resentment, this study suggested that what makes those AKP supporters who regard Turkish economy as satisfactory enough is their resentment.

Emotions are complex psychological states of being that involve cognitive, and behavioural responses to a stimulus or situation. Without a doubt, they have a

significant role upon the way we act, react, interact, construct our identities, make decisions, generate meanings out of things, and interpret the world around us (Ottati, 2001). Even though emotions are experienced individually, it should be emphasized that resentment could be so effective that it could direct and represent a whole group (Meltzer & Musolf, 2002). Likewise, with their speeches triggering anger, hatred, victimization, and anti-elitism and emphasizing victimization of religious or conservative identities, AKP authorities seem to constantly stimulate the emotion of resentment of their voters leading them to act, react, and shape their opinions in similar ways.

Victimization, reevaluation, negation, and rejection of morals, and glorification of sufferings are basic characteristics of resentful ones. In a highly polarized political atmosphere of Türkiye, the resentful interviewees seem to be holding on to the idea that they are victimized by powerful enemies which in this case corresponds with U.S., Israel, and other Western countries as external ones and CHP as the internal one which allows them to disown the responsibility for the failures. Poisoning the mind of the resentful (Scheler, 1994), resentment leads one to negate or revalue the characteristics they affiliate with their objectors and even to glorify his sufferings which is why being able to purchase what you wish is presented as a luxury while scavenging in the garbage is revalued and introduced as a merit. That is, identifying themselves not through their own morals and values but by objecting to the ones they affiliate with their opposites, as Mr. Koyuncu states, the resentful interviewees seem to prefer to deny the existing reality of economic problems just for the sake of not being on the same page with them.

### **Endnotes**

1. The term of resentment refers to a psychological state resulting from suppressed feelings of envy and hatred which cannot be satisfied.
2. Stranger is a term introduced by Georg Simmel. To him, there are objective cultures such as politics, religion, legal system, moral codes etc. They become so dominant that they take control, shape, and reshape people. However, as a sociologist who pays attention to particular and individual, Simmel suggests that there are also those whose subjective cultures conflict with the objective ones. As a result of the conflict between the subjective

and objective cultures, the latter, which is the dominant one, disregards, oppresses, and pushes away the former as a result of which individuals regard themselves as the Strangers of the society although they are a part of it.

3. Benedict Anderson introduces the concept of Imagined Community in order to suggest that nations are socially constructed entities rather than natural or eternal formations. To him, nations are imagined as their members will never meet, know, or hear of most of their fellow citizens. Despite this, they perceive themselves as part of a collective entity, bonded by shared identity and solidarity. Even though Anderson employs the concept as a means for nationalism, I use it in the sense of a group whose members share common, similar characteristics and orientations.
4. Ablution is an Islamic way of purification required before certain acts of worship, particularly before performing the prayers. It involves washing specific parts of the body in a prescribed manner, as outlined in Islamic teachings.
5. Altınyıldız is a famous textile brand in Türkiye that is considered to have quality products.
6. Bülent Ecevit was the president of Türkiye in 1974, 1977, 1978-1979, and 1999-2002.

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