

KEMALIST TATTOOING: DISTINCTIVE INK AND REPRODUCTION OF THE SECULAR IN CONTEMPORARY TURKEY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the practice of tattooing Atatürk symbolisms in contemporary Turkey. A practice that embodies and communicates the prominent state ideology of Kemalism, tattooing as a body modification, today is perceived as a practice that distinguishes subjects and indicates group or identity affiliation. The human body then, is utilized as a mediator of the individual's identity formation. Kemalist tattoos in Turkey thus, communicate citizens' Kemalist sentiments and embody the demarcation between two identities of Kemalists/secularists and Islamists. Apart from such incorporation to a certain group, Kemalist tattoos are manifestations of Turkish citizens' particular understandings of their own social, political, and gendered subjectivities.

Basing my research on an ethnographic field method, I first lay out the practice of Kemalist tattooing through the perspectives of tattoo artists, in order to demonstrate that Kemalist tattoos, according to their practitioners, harm the status of tattooing in the field of art. With this, I then move on to tattoo bearers and their positionalities within the practice. But more importantly, I argue that Kemalism, through these bodily inscriptions, as a social category among Turkish citizens, reifies other highly disputed and problematic categories like ethnicity, femininity, masculinity, and religiosity, which shapes people's understandings of identity-making and politics in Turkey.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION



Marjane Satrapi *Persepolis*, page 20.

The image above is taken from Marjane Satrapi's captivating graphic novel *Persepolis*, on the author's childhood experience in Iran, during and after the Islamic Revolution in 1979. This single strip from the novel reveals a crucial aspect of social reality: appearance matters. Satrapi rightfully—but not accurately, since Atatürk's eyes are known to be blue, instead of green—highlights Mustafa Kemal's colorful eyes, when she exemplifies what a Republican ideal is. Blue or green, Mustafa Kemal's eyes are indeed, a symbol of his heroic liberation of Turkey from the hands of the enemy. With his blue eyes, he redefined being a Turk as he became *Ata-türk*, "the father of Turks". Accentuated in all of his portraits; people admired and were taught to admire these blue eyes to this day.

Appearance matters and Kemal Atatürk thought so as well. With his many reforms after the Republic was established in 1923, he transformed not only the political outlook of Turkey by introducing new ways of governing, but also modes of public sociability—reforms that changed the way people dressed, spoke, and even named. The ideal Turkish man and woman no longer wore religious attire like the *fez* or the *veil*. Republican lifestyle is therefore, manifested on Turkish people's bodies, as secularism and Westernization, which

are the major principles of Kemalism, became the dominant forces of social life in Turkey. As Ozyurek (2005) points out, with the embeddedness of secularism in people's national imaginaries, "public expression of religious symbolism and the use of religion as a basis for political action are strictly prohibited" (510). This however, has been challenged greatly by the gradual incorporation of Islamism, which, as Göle (1997) states, is "the reappropriation of a Muslim identity and values as a basis for an alternative social and political agenda" (47). Thus, secularism and Islamism identities today, with AKP (Justice and Development Party)—a party that embodies an Islamist social and political agenda—winning the elections in 2002, have come to trigger an identity crisis. In my thesis, I take this very identity crisis that has been stirring up people's lives, as my main subject of inquiry through an anthropological study of the practice of Kemalist tattooing in Turkey.

Turkish citizens see the victory of Islamism as a threat towards Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's Turkey; not only a threat to the secular state, but also a confinement of the modern, Westernized way of living. Celebrations of Atatürk's modern Turkey is spread out throughout the year with national holidays—April 23rd, the inauguration of the parliament; May 19th, the day Atatürk initiated the independence war; October 29th, the establishment of the Republic, November 10th, his death-day and so on. From school children to war veterans, everyone attends these festivities at stadiums, streets, and squares, waving Turkish flags and singing nationalist marches every occasion possible. On June 1st 2013, another highly participated, but not so anticipated demonstration occurred in the city of Istanbul. They were demanding the government to stop demolishing a major city park in Taksim, while the police forces reacted with tear gas and water cannons. The protest quickly shifted its position; the struggle was against police violence and oppression that citizens have claimed to be subjected to by the Islamist (AKP) government. Then the Turkish flags appeared. Atatürk's portrait on posters, t-shirts materialized. The protest again quickly, but this time subtly, transformed into

a Kemalist, nationalist, and secularist one. Slogans of anti-fascism turned into the 10th Year March¹. Details of the still ongoing uprising aside, the heart of the matter here, is that Kemalism ideals are so embedded in Turkish citizens' social lives that they rise to every occasion with such prominence and force. Atatürk materializes on statues, street names, coat pins (Ozyurek 2006), t-shirts, fridge magnets; his silhouette is even in the sky and on mountain tops as mystic apparitions (Navaro-Yashin 2002).

Today, some people push even further and they deliberately and permanently inscribe their bodies with Kemalist symbolism. Tattooing Atatürk images (signature, portraits, etc.) on Turkish subjects is quite a recent practice that gained popularity in 2007. These tattoos—which I shall call Kemalist tattoos from now on—not only distinguishes people politically from others, but also engenders different social dynamics that impact notions of class, status, and most of all what it means to be a political subject and a ‘Turk’ among Turkish society. Tattooing political symbols like swastikas, or portraits of political actors in history like Che Guavera or George Washington have been quite common and inscribing Kemalist symbolisms would seemingly be similar to them. Indeed they are, Kemalist tattoos however, have a twist. In İzmir, since late 2007, every Turkish citizen can get a permanent inscription of Atatürk’s signature on his/her body for free.

Yılmaz Özdil, a famous journalist/columnist in Turkey, is known for his Kemalist views and writes on his column on November 10th, 2010 (Atatürk’s death-day) about this very campaign of getting free Kemalist tattoos. A man walks in to Köprüaltı Tattoo parlor in Alsancak, İzmir and requests the removal of his Atatürk signature tattoo, claiming that his boss at work threatens to fire him if he does not get it removed. Nicknamed as Doktor, Enver, the owner of the parlor reacts abruptly. In Özdil’s words, he says “My hands only inscribe our father’s signature, they do not remove!” And with this man, Enver decided to initiate a

¹ A nationalistic march that commemorates the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the Republic, written in 1933.

campaign of free Kemalist tattoos. Sensationalizing the incident, Özdil writes the incident like a fairy tale and ends as such: “What we call our Republic is lost by the coward fathers, but regained by the courageous young men” (Özdil 2010). Today, there are more than 10.000 Turkish citizens, who carry this free-of-charge Kemalist tattoos, mostly İzmirians; Doktor is proud and Yılmaz Özdil is certainly proud of Doktor for this initiative.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

Sociologist Emile Durkheim argued that the body is a source of, and a location for sacred phenomena that served as a connective entity between the sacred and the profane (Shilling 2003:9). Durkheim claims that the body is a site of basic social classifications and he gives the precise example of tattooing among totemic tribes in order to explain the incarnation of collective feelings in bodies. He describes imprintment of images or painting on the body is a sign of collectivity and belonging: “The purpose of the image is not to represent or evoke a particular object but to testify that a certain number of individuals share the same moral life” (Durkheim 1995:233-4). Durkheim, therefore, sets the foundations of regarding the body as a medium for communicating the sense of belonging and more generally, social representations and classifications.

Along with Durkheim, many other scholars who did major contributions to the disciplines of sociology and anthropology have touched upon the role of the body in social life (Gell 1993; Simmel 1971; Foucault 1995; Goffman 1969). Alfred Gell (1993) precisely focuses on tattooing practices of the body and states that “tattooing is a bodily code for registering social forces as part of the person on whom these social forces impinge, thereby creating a conceptual closure, a unity, out of what is... a relation of marginality and exclusion” (1993:27). The skin as a corporeal medium therefore, reflects a certain group formation that excludes individuals from others—differentiating Kemalists from Islamists in the case of Turkey. The symbolic aspect of tattoos demonstrate certain nationalities,

ideologies, or even social roles. In the case of contemporary Turkey, Kemalist tattoos mediate a certain identity formation—a Kemalist, secular, and anti-Islamist one—and intentionally shape their political subjectivities.

Also, with Terence Turner (1980) and his anthropological study of the surface of the body and practices like decorating, covering, or cleanliness, it is clear that the body is “a symbolic stage upon which the drama of socialisation is enacted” (Turner 1980:112). The skin is, indeed, a concrete boundary that embodies social differences, as well as similarities among groups of people. Recognizing the studies I have mentioned above is significant in conceptualizing the practice of tattooing Atatürk images in the fields of sociology and anthropology. Kemalist tattoos are not just symbolisms of forming a political/ideological identity among these Turkish citizens; it is also a interactive performance that heavily involves the surface of the body as a site of producing the sense of belonging, hence forming a group identity in opposition to *the other*, in this case, the Islamist government and its subscribers. Moreover, this performativity and staging of the body is used as a “public display of self to differentiate [oneself] from others and indicate inclusion with a subculture of status, occupation, or value orientation” (Simmel 1950:238). It is a way of presenting a certain gendered, racial-ized, eroticized, disciplined or nationalized identity through a deliberate act of putting the body out in the public.

Timothy Mitchell (1990) argues that the dynamic relationship between power structures and autonomous political subjects have long been seen through the dichotomy of the material and the meaning. He opposes such a neatly distinctive dualism by stating that this limits our understanding of human subjectivity (1990:546-7); that such a two-dimensional vision of the social world—cultural (or meaning) and material reality—fails us to investigate everyday and public uses—in Mitchell’s terms, ‘metaphors’—of power that intersperse and eventually mix these two realms of material and meaning together. I perceive

Kemalist tattoos therefore, in their materiality as inscribed on Turkish subjects that signify meaningful statements of political subjectivities. As Mahmood (2009) draws from William J. Thomas Mitchell (2005), images are “not just as inert objects but as animated beings that exert a certain force in this world” (Mahmood 2009:842). Indeed, Kemalist symbolic images like Atatürk’s signature or his portrait, materialized through ink on bodies, cannot be pulled apart from its carrier or its spectator; that the vision image is in close relationship with the frame (the body) him/herself, and also with the outside social world. They not only communicate certain meanings within such relationality, but also mediate Turkish citizens distinctive national and secular appearances.

Anthropologist Nilüfer Göle states that the ongoing conflict between secularism and Islamism in Turkey has been fueled not just in the political arena, but also in the public sphere—through what she calls body politics that include “disputes over lifestyles, exposures of the self...” (Göle 1997:48). To discuss the social intricacies of this exposures of self through Kemalist tattoos, I take a Bourdieuan analytical stance and his conceptual tools like habitus, cultural and symbolic capital, and field, which I lay out in my main empirical chapters. I also find it useful to apply Michel Foucault’s (1990; 1995) conception of power and the body and Erving Goffman’s (1969) theoretical approach to the social performance and presentation of self, which I will discuss in the following paragraphs.

Michel Foucault (1995) argues that power and domination is everywhere; that it is resonated both in the realm of the public and private. Foucault, more specifically, conceptualizes the body as “a site where regimes of discourse and power inscribe themselves” (Butler 1989:601). Ideologies, power structures, forms of identification therefore, are incarnated in the materiality of the body. He also describes the body as “a surface, a set of multidirectional forces, and as the scene or site of cultural inscription” (1989:603). The malleable, constantly changing characteristic of the body is, then highly

affected by forms of power—both in ideological and physical terms. In the case of Turkey, however, I shall focus on Foucault’s understanding of the ways in which bodies are sites “which receive meaning from, and is constituted by, external forces” (Shilling 2003: 70). The practice of Kemalist tattoos, adopted by Turkish people, can be related to a Foucauldian analysis of the body. Rather than regarding the power structure or ideology as something that is forcefully imposed on the body, we can see Kemalism as the overarching social force that Turkish people voluntarily subscribe to and how they willingly use their bodies as a site to manifest this powerful idea and to instrumentalize this bodily practice in order to showcase a resistance against the current Islamist government. Further by referring to ‘docile bodies’, Foucault argues that “discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies... Discipline increases the forces of the body and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)” (1995:138). In light of this, the Turkish nation’s subjugation to the Kemalist ideology, their acceptance and later, strong approval towards a laicist lifestyle directly influences the presentation of the body in the public sphere. The body, therefore, is subjected, in its physicality, and seen as an entity that can be restricted. It, therefore, highlights the body as a medium that communicates not just the individual’s national, political identity, but also his unconscious subjugation to a state ideology.

Apart from Foucault’s conception of the body and its docility, I intend to apply Erving Goffman’s idea of the self “as a product of performances staged in social life” (Branaman 1997:lxiii), in order to point out that this bodily practice is driven with a “live agency” (Goffman 1974:22). Goffman argues that the self is attached to the society and freely chooses certain social frames so as to present a certain identity. He also suggests that “a self is not simply a product of performance, but is a product of the framing of a person’s actions and performances” (Branaman 1997:lxvii). Thus, through Goffman’s concept of performance, I intend to explore to what extent do the bearers of Kemalist tattoos take it upon

themselves (and their bodies) to physically act as a reminder of Turkey's lay legacy in the face of what they perceive as the danger of Islamization. Further, the public display or the exposure of Kemalist tattoos denotes to a certain performativity that Miller (2007) rightly puts it: "the assumption that human beings have no innate selfhood or subjectivity but become what they are through more or less forced repetition of a certain role" (225). Thus, the performativity of a Kemalist selfhood, through the tangible medium of bodies, not only the state ideology is made apparent in the public, but also a certain subjectivity is engendered and perpetuated continuously.

All in all, in this thesis I argue that the practice of Kemalist tattooing is a manifestation of Turkish citizens' particular understandings of their own social, political, gendered subjectivities. Kemalist tattoos, as body modifications, I present, are intangible bodily adornments that communicate one's positioning in the social world that ultimately is fueled greatly by his/her national identity. Therefore, by looking at both tattoo makers and tattooed subjects, I investigate these particular bodily appearances presented, performed, and internalized, in order to reveal political, national, and gendered imaginaries of the Turkish citizens.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Before presenting a detailed description and analysis of my case, I outline a number of anthropological and sociological works that investigate significant themes, issues, practices, and phenomena, which I intend to deal with in my thesis. Besides reviewing literature on tattooing, body politics, and nationalism, I also present a number of works that focus on the same geographical region, which allows me to first acknowledge such existing anthropological research, and then expand from them so as to scrutinize a new and different practice that concerns similar conceptual frameworks.

2.1 *Politics in the Everyday Life*

Anthropologist Michael Herzfeld in his ethnographic study on what he calls the social poetics of the nation-state, declares that a top-down approach towards understanding the nation-state, adopted by many scholars like Anderson (1983) and Gellner (1983) may point out how “nationalism offered citizens a means of converting their own deaths into a shared immortality” (Herzfeld 2005:6). However, this approach—rather than taking into account the details of everyday life—is not satisfactory for deciphering “the cultural specificity of each nationalism”, neither it is adequate for questioning what Herzfeld calls “rueful self-recognition, this inward acknowledgment of cultural intimacy” (2005:7). Thus, Herzfeld, in his book *Cultural Intimacy*, takes on an analytical stance that spotlights everyday lives of the ordinary so as to scrutinize how an ordinary collective experiences their nationhood and perpetuates their shared commonalities according to their social imaginaries.

These shared commonalities respectively reproduce, even though minor but disruptive, differences. Arjun Appadurai (2006) discusses particularly this in today’s context of globalization in his book, *Fear of Small Numbers: A national sovereignty which “is built on some sort of ethnic genius”* and rests on unity, in the face of minor differences that disrupt this oneness, produces what Appadurai calls, “anxiety of incompleteness” (2006:8). Such

anxiety of a national, ethnic, or racial majority, Appadurai argues, sparks violent “ethnocidal mobilization” rooted in “predatory narcissisms”, which in “a world of blurred boundaries, mixed marriages, shared languages, and other deep connectivities” (11) becomes highly problematic. Globalization brought not only continuous and rapid flows of goods and services, but also “mass-mediated, sometimes commoditized, images of self, [which] create a growing archive of hybridities” (83). With the blurring of distinctive selfhoods, such anxieties and narcissisms become even more accentuated in our globalized world.

As Herzfeld (2005) mentions, “in the aftermath of the overthrow of the Ottoman rulers” (16), Turkey underwent an identity transformation, which engendered a collective regrouping under the national identity of *Türk*. This new identity as a single shared commonality, despite its encompassing of many ethnic minority groupings like Kurds, Armenians, became a matter of state policy that redefined people’s national selfhoods. Turkish identity therefore, to this day, is reproduced in people’s social and political imaginaries both in public and private spheres.

2.2 The Case of Turkey

Identity politics and everyday life practices in Turkey have always been so intertwined with each other ever since the establishment of the Republic. As Göle (1996) remarks, the impact of modernizing and Westernizing reforms have resonated both in the public and private sphere and also led to a “self-(re)definition of Turks” (3). Many anthropologists highlight this deep connection in their works and bring to light many particularities of how people make sense of their national, gendered, ethnic, or religious identities in the context of Turkey. Ozyurek (2006) in her ethnography on secularism and everyday politics in Turkey through the lens of people’s remembering the past. She argues that “privatization of the production, circulation, and consumption of Atatürk’s image, as well as the personalization of the form and content of the representations of him” (94), is a

new phenomenon that is rooted not only in the ever-growing Kemalist ideology, but also in the gradual but continuous liberalization of the markets with neoliberal policies of the Turkish state.

Ozyurek's account on such manifestations of the secularist Turkish state in the everyday politics necessitates grasping what kind of secularism Turkey has adopted more than eighty years ago. Göle (1997) explains this notion by first, giving a brief account of how it is closer to the notion of French *laïcité*, and then calling upon Ernest Gellner (1981) and his argument that Turkish secularism is one that is didactic: "moralistic and pedagogical, teaching and imposing a modern way of life" (68). This didactic secularism was conveyed through not only institutional and legislative changes like "the abolition of Sultanate and the Caliphate in 1924; [or] the adoption of a secular civil code of law from Switzerland in 1926" (Göle 1997:49), but also through major transformations of people's lifestyles; the way people dress, speak, and so on.

An anthropologist, who researches this very secularist lifestyle in the everyday life of Turkish citizens, Navaro-Yashin (2002) explores the image of Atatürk "that used to be an emblem of the sovereignty of the Turkish state, associated with institutions and rituals of state" (188). She argues that, what she calls Atatürkist—or Kemalist—manifestations that represent the detachment of religion from the state—the secularist ideology, "took on magical, ritualesque, and mystical dimensions" (191). By ritualizing the commemoration of Atatürk and his ideological legacy and rendering his image ubiquitous all throughout the nation, Turkish society not only anthropomorphize the notion of the state (192), but also accentuate the great divide between the two ideologies, Islamism and Kemalism. Both Ozyurek (2006) and Navaro-Yashin (2002) delve into compelling issues that concern identity politics in the modern Turkish nation-state and reverberations of it in both public and private sphere. Göle (1996), on the other hand, deals similarly, with identity and the public/private

divide in looking at everyday practices Turkey, but pinpoints a single one—the practice of veiling, which reveals another set of conundrums; those of Islamism and modernism and “an interplay between gender identities and political ideologies” (9). She points out different views of Islamist and Westernized individuals on gender and on the body in order to highlight that these social and ideological differences are continuously negotiated, discussed, and impacted by the current political context of the Turkish nation-state. The practice of veiling is a “political reappropriation of Islamic religiosity” (1), which therefore, not only politicizes the feminine body, but also engenders a collective identity against modernity (5). What Göle discusses is that veiled women, as social agents, utilize their veil—their bodily appearance—as symbolic capital (Göle 1996:5; also in Bourdieu 1984) in order to “empower themselves through their claim on Islamic knowledge,” which distinguishes themselves from secularized and modern bodies, and thusly enables them to “resist against the abstract hegemony of Western civilization over social manners” (135). Quoting Michel Foucault (1990) on the body and how it “becomes a symbol of resistance as much as of power relations” (Göle 1996:135), Göle demonstrates this by historicizing the conflict between Islamism and modernism in Turkey and specifically showing that a religious practice manifested on the body, like veiling, is highly related to power apparatuses in society.

Foucault’s argument on the body and its deep association with power relations opens up also another discussion on conceptualizing the body, which I will convey through the lens of my empirical data. Nilüfer Göle’s study on modernization and veiling is only one example of the body’s symbolic and politicized characteristic. My thesis deals with another bodily practice—the practice of tattooing—which I shall focus on in the next section.

2.3 Tattooing the Self, Marking Social Boundaries

Many scholars, among which are Blanchard (1994), Gell (1993), Pritchard (2000), Orend and Gagné (2009) and Fisher (2002) find it crucial to recognize tattooing as both

physical and social and that it has been a practice that reveals many implications about the relationship between selfhoods that materialize on the body and their external social and cultural contexts. Alfred Gell, in his anthropological work on tattooing practices in Polynesia, states that “tattooing is a bodily code for registering social forces as part of the person on whom these social forces impinge,” (1993:27) and indeed, throughout history, the practice has been analyzed “as a form of resistance to or a symptom of a culture that has commodified the body” (Fisher 2002:92). Once common among criminals or slaves in the Roman Empire, tattooing later on and still today, has kept its close association to vulgarity and deviance and lingered among the unconsented bodies like gang members, prisoners and teenage rebels.

Deviant or not, however, the profound characteristic of tattooing—like any other practice of customizing the body—that it marks the individual and distinguishes the subject from the unmarked is still prominent today and many social, cultural, and political factors play into this distinction in every context. Blanchard (1994) adds to this distinction and puts emphasis on “the special relation between image and support or frame” (288). He refers to the body as the frame for the tattoo image and as a medium or support that delivers the symbolic meaning of the image itself, in order to explain how a certain image on a certain subjective body situates the subject into a social group. Therefore, it is appropriate to raise Mary Douglas’ (1966) idea of the body politic, that “the physical body is an expression of culturally imposed meanings” (Douglas *in* Orend and Gagné 2009:497), which conveys the deeply embedded connection of the body and its social and cultural context.

Adding to this, Turner (1999) opens a space to discuss tattooing in contemporary society and how they have “become a regular aspect of consumer culture, where they add cultural capital to the body’s surface” (40). Just like consumption of any commodity or service in today’s mainstream society, tattoos—rather than simply signifying identities—have become “commercial objects in a leisure marketplace and... optional aspects of a body

aesthetic, which playfully and ironically indicate social membership” (Turner *in* Orend and Gagné 2009:495). Orend and Gagné (2009) expands on this approach and investigates how corporate logo tattoos can be understood by looking at today’s postmodern and highly commercialized society and the ways in which these “human billboards” (511)—referring to tattooed bodies—reflect the embeddedness of corporations and consumption of their products into people’s lives. The authors, in order to delve into the ways in which social forces—in their case, mass consumer culture—impinge upon the human bodies, discuss whether “those who alter their bodies are passively ‘duped’ into conforming to social pressures or whether they are active agents in constructing their own bodies” (497). This volatile role of agency in getting corporate logo tattoos is therefore, very crucial in the authors’ research, which I shall discuss further in my own thesis.

By delienating the literature above, I focused on highlighting some significant themes such as nationalism and nation-state, its close relationship with the human body, tattooing as a social and individual practice and so on. In light of all these, I show that such powerful ideologies that Kemalism have come to encompass to this day—such are secularism and nationalism—are manifested and mediated through social and political bodies, which makes way for these Turkish citizens to situate certain social distinctions, classifications, and identifications, so as to not only maintain and reproduce their secularist and Kemalist subjectivities, but also put forth their disagreement and disdain for Islamism and the AKP government. The Kemalist tattoo on political bodies then, I argue, is the signifier of resistance, agency, individual *and* social distinction all at the same time.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

In this thesis, my object of study is mainly, tattoos of images and inscriptions that symbolize Atatürk as a public figure and his Kemalist ideology. They are icons; they “refer not simply to an image but to a cluster of meanings that might suggest a persona, an authoritative presence, or even a shared imagination” (Mahmood 2009:845). The visual therefore, is heavily charged with deeply rooted cultural and political meanings for people. Therefore, for this thesis, I found conducting an ethnographic research necessary for grasping how Turkish citizens make sense of these images and reproduce knowledge and identity. I argue that the significance of these tattoos is *not* their shape, content, or form; what is critical for me to inquire about is how Turkish citizens mold their understanding of politics and their disagreement with the state apparatus through self-fashioning and actively modifying their bodies. Just like Orend and Gagné (2009), I heavily rely on qualitative methods that I believe shed light on “underlying motivations, feelings, values, attitudes, and perceptions” (498) about this social practice.

I conducted an ethnographic research in the cities of İzmir and İstanbul. In İzmir, I focused mainly on one tattoo parlor, Köprüaltı Tattoo, which my thesis showcases extensively, however, I also visited and spent time daily in other tattoo parlors like Art Core Tattoo and Dream Art Tattoo located in the same district, Alsancak, İzmir. In Istanbul, on the other hand, I also visited a few tattoo parlors in the main districts of Caddebostan and Kadıköy, among which are Dreamcatcher Tattoo, Elephant Tattoo and Tattoo Erol. Going to these tattoo parlors allowed me to find people who carry such tattoos; therefore, I benefited from these parlors’ employees’ social networks and conducted semi-structured interviews with Istanbulian tattoo bearers. Because my thesis is more concerned with free Kemalist tattoo campaign in İzmir, which tattoo artists in Istanbul did not take part of, my research in Istanbul works in helping me strengthen my argument on the tattoo bearers. In my research, I

rely on informal conversations, semi-structured interviews, group interviews with people, and most importantly participant observation. Doing ethnographic research on a case that revolves around actors with different roles, I believe that participant observation not only reveals people's bodily dispositions around the social space and in the presence of an outsider and a researcher, but also it shows how people communicate with each other—relationship among tattooists, customer-tattooist relations, friendships, family ties all play a role into my research that help me understand the intricacies of the campaign specifically, and also the practice of Kemalist tattooing in general.

Inquiring on a case that heavily and similarly concerns images, icons, and a political controversy—namely, the Danish cartoons of Prophet Muhammed that stirred up global media in 2008, Saba Mahmood (2009) compellingly points out that the icon has “the capacity to allow an individual to find him/herself in a structure that has bearing on how one conducts oneself in this world” (845). In looking at Kemalist tattoos, I aim to scrutinize precisely this: how the image of the Atatürk signature (or his portrait) inscribed on the body makes way for Turkish citizens to position themselves and shape their self-presentation in their actions and their discourse among their social worlds. To do this, I find it crucial to engage in verbal, face-to-face interactions with my informants, which an ethnographic method allows me to achieve.

My informants consist of tattoo artists and tattoo bearers, which allows me to grasp both sides of the practice—the giver and the receiver of the icon. Since tattooing is an interactive practice between these two parties, I did not limit my method to conducting semi-structured interviews individually; I also looked for occasions that allowed me to observe and engage in group conversations during the process of getting the tattoo. Göle (1996), in her ethnographic research on Islamist veiling in Turkey, emphasizes that pointing out the relational setting and investigating the practice *not* one-on-one, but through “rendering

narratives of social actors in terms of their relationships and conflicts,” that will “reinforce the self-reflexivity of actors” (10). The basic procedure of getting a tattoo already requires a relationality; the customer most of the time, acquaints him/herself with the tattoo artist through verbal interaction, which certainly worked for my advantage in partaking in these conversations.

4.0 TATTOOING AS A FIELD OF PRACTICE IN İZMİR

After 8-hours of traveling, the bus gets closer to the city of Izmir, a statue stands by the road—a larger than life-size Mustafa Kemal Atatürk bust along with a woman and a soldier holding an olive tree branch together. The statue greets you to the city of Izmir, not only reminding the new comers that just like any other city, it is a part of Atatürk's Turkey, but also implying the significance of Izmir in history—the hills where Atatürk's troops won the freedom of Turks and “threw the Greeks back to the sea”—as every Turkish citizen learns in school—are here.

At the center of Alsancak, the main district in Izmir, walking along the Kıbrıs Şehitleri (Martyrs of Cyprus) street, an indoor passageway turns into a tiny bazaar. This shopping area, however, neither sells exotic spices, nor Turkish carpets as one would expect from a bazaar in Turkey. Unofficially named “the American bazaar”, little shops inside this passageway contain all kinds of beauty products such as shampoos, nail polish, along with cigarettes, tobacco, electronics, hard liquor, and even protein shakes for bodybuilding. The products are “American” and it is the main destination for Izmirian consumers to indulge in everything that is American. One shop stands out from all the other ones that are packed fully with products. Köprüaltı Tattoo, located at the end of the passageway, looks empty and yet visually quite mesmerizing. One of the two tattoo parlors in the American bazaar, Köprüaltı is certainly not modest when it comes to its decorations. Crowded with tattoo sample images, some torn from sketchbooks, others neatly printed off the internet, the walls seen from the shop's window and the blasting hip-hop music fit perfectly to the Americanized character of the entire passageway. Tattoo artists and customers chat and hang out under the lingering presence of cigarette smoke, sipping on their Turkish teas. Tattoo samples range from butterflies, eagles, skulls, and detailed sketches of tribal tattoos all the way to portraits of

Michael Jackson, Tupac and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk—Atatürk on the battlefield, in Western clothing, or in military uniform. Besides the tattoo samples, Atatürk is also showcased all around the tattoo parlor with large-size posters, that indicate the shop and its owner's political opinion. Kemalism is not only emphasized with tattoo images and posters in this space; it is also apparent on artists' bodies.

In this section, I closely examine the innerworkings of Köprüaltı Tattoo parlor's free-of-charge Kemalist tattoos campaign, investigate specific actors' perceptions towards the practice, and analyze it through the lens of tattoo artists' perspective so as to understand the status of Kemalist tattoos in the field of tattoo art.

4.1 *"It is not a tattoo; it is a reaction"*

Doktor, the owner of Köprüaltı Tattoo in his 40s, says his opinion on the political situation of his country in a straightforward manner:

"Our people cannot fathom what is going on around them in this country. These people do not have the capability to fully understand the real history of Turkey. They think that betraying the blood of the soldiers, who have sacrificed their lives for this country means being a good countryman. There is a serious plan out there for Turkey and it is about to be launched. As Brother Aziz² has once said, 90% of Turkey is just like sheep. These people³ say, 'we are about to sell off a part of this country. We are breaking it up into pieces'. They still get their votes. If this is the case, then those 90% is definitely stupid".

Without hesitating to talk to me—a stranger who introduces herself as a researcher/student, Doktor knew exactly how to express his feelings and opinion about Turkey's future. A single wall in his shop is dedicated to his achievements—his license of being a tattoo and piercing artist and his awards from several competitions in the past. Next to them, Atatürk's portrait is neatly framed and situated. He tells me the story of his "Atatürk's signature tattoos: free of charge" campaign that is still ongoing today. He says, "that is the last thing we would have done; covering an Atatürk signature tattoo is unacceptable," voicing his strict manner towards this issue. He equates the desire to conceal a tattoo of Atatürk's signature with one's

² Aziz Nesin is a Turkish writer and humorist.

³ Here, he refers to the AKP (Justice and Development Party) government.

cowardice and lack of understanding the political and social threat that the AKP government poses and adds to this: “As a person who has fully grasped the meaning of republicanism and who fully respects the struggles that our soldiers have gone through to keep the country intact, I strongly believe that carrying this tattoo should be an honor.” A tattoo artist most often faces decisions that might result in his/her position as a tattooist and as an individual with certain moral values to clash (Fisher 2002: 98). As Fisher points out, most of the time when customers come to the shop to get “racist or anti-social phrases” (2002:99) or stigmatized marks like swastikas, the tattooist have the tendency to refuse to do them. Doktor then, puts forth his moral judgment by refusing to cover a tattoo and develops a reputation for himself and his shop as the Kemalist one—the shop that does Atatürk signature tattoos free of charge. Thus, Doktor’s political subjectivity is very much articulated in his identity as a tattoo artist.

Doktor expresses many of his social positions steadfastly through his body. His leather jacket that he wears even if it is 30 degrees outside, is filled with pins and badges—an Atatürk bust pin, a Beşiktaş badge⁴, an a Turkey flag pin, and another one with a peace sign. Once he takes off the leather jacket, another layer of his personhood unveils: tattoos all around his arms, other ones that partly reveal themselves from his t-shirt collar. His long beard and facial piercings complement this manly ‘biker’ impression even more. He comes to the parlor almost every day late in the afternoon and joins the other tattooists with tea and cigarettes. After enjoying some mundane chatting with customers and friends, he gets up and starts strolling around the bazaar. He stops at the entrance and gazes at the very old poster of an astronaut on the moon that is hung effortlessly on the door. “Ah, we need to do something about this now.” Doktor finds a Turkish flag image and a Beşiktaş emblem on the Internet, prints them out and decides that instead of the American flag badge, the astronaut should

⁴ Beşiktaş is one of the three major soccer teams in Turkey.

carry a Turkish flag on his arm and a Beşiktaş badge on his chest. He neatly sticks them on the poster: “There, that is so much better,” and looks at me while I am smiling and at the same time, trying not to make it too obvious that I have been watching him throughout the whole process. Looking proud, he asks me, “Doesn’t it look nicer now?” I remain silent and just nod.

Doktor’s Atatürk tattoo is not visible surprisingly and although this confirms his opinion about the individualist character of tattooing, it also highlights the contradictoriness of his argument on tattooing:

Now, this has an individualistic mode and a social or communal one. Atatürk’s signature tattoos are merely social things. I do not even consider them as tattoos; they are a way of reacting. Normally tattooing is an individual entity. You do not want your tattoo to be on other people’s bodies, you want something unique, different. But the shape of Atatürk’s signature is fixed; you cannot change it. It is always the same... Mostly people get it above the waist... anywhere really. It does not matter where. What is important is that the person *knows* that he/she is carrying it on their body.

For Doktor then, carrying a Kemalist tattoo implies a social/political reaction against the government, which he defines as the social aspect of these tattoos. However, he also informs me that what is more important is the person’s *awareness* of carrying it on their skin, emphasizing on the individuality of the tattoo; that the tattoo’s visibility or in other words, its communication to the outside world is not crucial. What is more important is the person feeling and consciously choosing to carry it, which insinuates a certain convolution of his stance towards Kemalist tattoos. Such dichotomy of individual and social poses many implications about politically symbolic tattoos like Kemalist ones. They at first glance, stand as a symbolic representation, which denotes a strong connection with what Doktor refers to as social. These tattoos then, are highly indicative of one’s identity. Doktor therefore, by putting emphasis on one’s consciousness and self-recognition, produces a certain political subjectivity that he assumes to be the right one to be shared by everyone, who carries a Kemalist tattoo. Gell (1993), on the matter of individuality, suggests that there is not a clear-cut separation between individuality and identity, “since a social identity could be purely

categorical/relational, without implying any individuality at all, in the sense of independence, boundedness, self-containedness, etc” (35). Thus, Doktor’s reflection on an Atatürk tattoo’s role of individuation and socialization implies that these two roles are not to be separated; they work together so as to represent a social individuality that cannot be detached from its social space.

As the father of the campaign, Doktor points out that people who get these tattoos have the awareness and true belief of what Kemalism stands for. He goes further by saying, “This is about belief... It is certainly not an act of blinded nationalism. Kemalism is different”. Although he does not elaborate further, Doktor’s short remark reveals that he does not perceive Kemalism and nationalism as the same. With this, Doktor situates himself and the people who get Kemalist tattoos as fully aware of what Kemalism is and as conscious of the fact that having one of these tattoos meant not being blinded by a nationalist ideal. He also adds, “Kemalism includes nationalism in it, of course. But people who call themselves nationalists today in Turkey are Grey Wolves⁵; they are not Kemalists... Our ideals are valuing the soil of your nation, to strive for the welfare of your country everyday. That is Kemalism. People who have this tattoo should truly perceive this with their mind and their heart.” Differentiating these ideologies therefore, help him situate his own political subjectivity. He perceives them *not* as regular tattoos—body inscriptions that form and foster a group identity—but as a way of reaction and resistance against the national and foreign policies of the current Islamist government. Doktor tells me that ever since the campaign started in December 2007, they have given away more than 10.000 Atatürk signature tattoos to people in İzmir and also to people, who come from other cities. He firmly states also “this campaign will not stop till the day I close up this shop!” He is determined to maintain the campaign, and yet still confirms that people do not come as frequently as before.

⁵ Grey Wolves, also known as the Idealist Youth, is an ultra-nationalist, neo-fascist youth organization. For a historical account on the emergence of Grey Wolves and Nationalist Action Party, see Yavuz, Hakan. 2002. “The Politics of Fear: The Rise of the Nationalist Action Party in Turkey. *Middle East Journal*. Vol 56(2).

4.2 Differing Perceptions Towards the Campaign

After Doktor initiated the campaign of free Atatürk tattoos in 2007, other tattoo parlors followed the trend, but not fully. Most of the tattoo parlors in Izmir preferred to give away Atatürk tattoos for free only during the month of November as a commemorative act towards Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's death-day on November 10th, which is a national holiday in Turkey since 1938. However, not only do other tattoo parlors perceive Köprüaltı Tattoo's campaign in very different terms, but they also have, in reality, quite a different motive to follow this campaign. Tattooists who work at Dream Art Tattoo, just a few hundred meters away from Köprüaltı explain their strong opposition to the campaign, even though they felt "obligated" to implement the campaign during the month of November in 2010. Peri, a female tattoo artist in her 30s, after greeting me into the parlor, expresses her opinion on the issue: "Doing these tattoos for free is so degrading for us. Using Atatürk's image and his identity like this is such a disgrace," showing that not only does she consider tattooing for free in general to be contemptible for her profession of being a tattooist, but she also finds Atatürk tattoos in particular, to be disrespectful for what Atatürk stands for in Turkey's history. Keni, her colleague, turns around from the computer screen and adds: "We did the same thing a few years ago. The people just did not show up to the appointments; they change their minds because they are afraid, and since it is for free, why bother calling and letting us know that they are not even going to come..." and explaining that the customers do not have a 'real' love for Atatürk, that the only reason they get it is because it is for free. Keni and Peri, also both complain about how Köprüaltı's tattooists lack craftsmanship and hygiene. "There are such ugly looking Atatürk signature tattoos out there." Azimet and Anıl, male tattooists at Art Core Tattoo also agree with others and add even further: "Yes, it did start off with that incident. But the purpose of it derailed tremendously. It is purely for advertising their tattoo parlor... And for this reason, the handiwork, the hygiene is all gone." All four tattoo artists articulate not only mistrust towards Köprüaltı's purpose behind the

campaign, but they also feel degradation as tattoo artists to give away tattoos, and skepticism towards why people get Atatürk tattoos. Taking Bourdieu's concept of *field* as a starting point to analyze this conflictual view towards Kemalist tattoos, the four tattooists situate themselves as artists and legitimize their profession's artistic quality through not only their own status, but also their customers' status in the social field.

Bourdieu defines field as a space in which "social agents [use] differing strategies to maintain or improve their position" (Grenfell 2008:70) and goes on to point out that "every field is the site of more or less overt struggle over the definition of the legitimate principles of division of the field" (1985:208). Hence, in the field of tattoo art, Peri, Keni, Azimet, and Anil denounce Köprüaltı's campaign of free-of-charge tattoos, so as to situate both themselves and their field at a higher status particularly in the economic sense. Peri declares, "Tattooing is a luxurious practice." Indeed, just like Peri, others also feel the need to differentiate tattoo bearers as subjects of a higher economic status as a strategy to maintain their own artistic and higher status position in the field of tattooing. Such differentiation, or distinction in Bourdieuan terms, among their field is based on their strong disapproving stance against Köprüaltı's campaign, hence a deliberate "sign of superiority" (Crossley *in* Grenfell 2008:96).

As said above, Azimet believes that having a tattoo is a distinctive characteristic of an individual and that it provides a certain social status: "Today in Izmir, even the street vendor or the homeless on the street have Atatürk signature tattoos, but they just look horrendous. If Atatürk was alive, he would want to decapitate the tattooists, who draw his signature on people's bodies so horribly." His strong statement on the craftsmanship of these free tattoos and disapproval for people from a lower economic status to have tattoos is clearly apparent here. He goes on to tell me that he even asks for a higher price from people who come to the parlor asking for an Atatürk tattoo:

We never did any tattoo for free. We even request higher prices for these Atatürk tattoos. First we evaluate the person. Would this tattoo fit the customer's personality, social status, and lifestyle? From the looks of him/her, it shows. For Atatürk tattoos, if the person, who wants it does not seem fully aware of the meaning of this tattoo, then we set the price way higher... 1000 euros... It shows from the way the customer acts when he/she enters the parlor.

Azimet, as a tattoo artist, instead of letting the customer to be an active agent in deciding to modify his/her body (Orend and Gagné 2009), he puts forth his own agency to determine whether the customer is suitable for the tattoo or not. With this, therefore, he finds people's appearances and manners as determining categories of their statuses and suitability for the tattoo. By exercising such a power over his customers, Azimet legitimizes his own status among the field of tattoo art and differs himself from the artists, who do free tattoos without any evaluation of the customers' statuses and lifestyle. He exemplifies this status-making of himself and of his potential customers through his discourse even further:

Someone came in the other day; he had gotten a free Atatürk signature tattoo a few weeks ago from Köprüaltı—he told me himself. He came in basically, to ask me how to take care of the tattoo; he had no idea, they did not instruct him at all. They were supposed to give a special lotion for it; they did not! He did not take care of it; he is so uneducated, he does not know any better. Obviously, the tattoo looked awful so I sold the guy that special lotion. I do not see the point of these kind of people getting tattoos, it doesn't fit them.

Here, Azimet openly criticizes both the practice of giving away free tattoos and also the customer, who is 'unfit' for having any tattoo, let alone a Kemalist tattoo. He categorizes customers according to their education level and lifestyle and therefore, selectively chooses clientele as a way to maintain the 'luxurious-ness' and high status of tattooing as a professional field.

Anıl, on the other hand, draws attention to his disapproval of Atatürk tattoos from a different angle: "I am very against this. It has become a brand. This man is the founder of your country. You cannot just adapt his image to popular culture... They do it just to have a tattoo... So then, this degrades the meaning and value of the Atatürk signature, of course." His disapproval is rooted in that Atatürk's signature has become commodified and consumed by Turkish mainstream society. Such multiplication of Atatürk's image and commodification

of him, as Ozyurek (2006) argues, indicates a privatization of a state symbolism, “as Kemalist consumers moved the official state imagery out of the traditional realm of the state and into the market and their homes” (2006:98) and on their bodies. The tattoo, the ultimate but intangible product of tattoo artists, like Anıl, becomes a commodity that circulates and is reproduced in the field of tattoo art.

As tattooing came to reflect an individuation it also helped the tattoo maker to legitimize his/her profession in the field of artistic production (DeMello 1995; 2000). Thus, the tattoo both becomes a source of economic capital for the artist to gain recognition and status and endures its symbolic value as well. In his investigation on consumer culture and the body, Shilling (2003) brings in Featherstone (1990), who argues “the rapid... circulation of consumer and ‘lifestyle’ goods threatens the readability of those signs used by the dominant to signify their elite physical capital” (Shilling 2003:125). Therefore, tattoos as a ‘lifestyle’ good reflect both the tattoo artists’ originality and skill, hence their artistic reputation; also the tattoo bearers’ social identity. Therefore, the trivialization of tattooing as a practice that reflects a certain lifestyle, in other words a certain social status and removing the commodity’s exchange value, which directly denotes to the artists’ source of economic capital diminishes the tattoo artists’ status in the field.

Moreover, the practice of tattooing Atatürk images, regardless of whether they are free of charge or not, surely is a manifestation of such personalization and trivialization of not only his image, but also what he stands for ideologically. Indeed, as Turner (1999) argues, in today’s post-modern world, “the modern tattoo is an expression of the growing individualism... [it] is another sign to be read within consumer culture” (49). Thus, the Kemalist tattoos, as tokens of this coupling of a state ideology with consumerism and individualism, weakens the political meaning of these symbolisms. Orend and Gagné (2009) draw ideas from Jean Baudrillard’s writings (2001) and point out that consumerism, mass

production of not just goods and services, but also commoditized ideas, symbolisms—like in the case of Kemalist tattoos—has “led to a loss of meaning, with the sign bearing little, if any, connection to its original referent” (495). Anıl therefore, situates himself as an opposer to such consumption, and yet informs me that he never refuses to do political tattoos including Atatürk images in order to maintain his economic and social status in the field of tattooing.

Doktor’s on-going “free Atatürk tattoos” campaign gains momentum every day, reaching a national level: tattoo parlors in big cities like Eskişehir, İstanbul, and Ankara adopt the politically charged practice and spread this phenomenon of labeling the self as Kemalist for free. For Doktor and many other tattooists, the campaign might suggest to urge people’s awareness, visualize their self-recognition as Kemalist subjectivities on their skin, and resist the Islamist way of living that Doktor believes to be forced upon the nation. He utilizes his profession deliberately to communicate his own political subjectivity and strives to spread it to his clientele. His colleagues from other parlors however, believe that the campaign demonstrates a trivialization of what they call “their artistic expression”, which disarrays their status as artists. In this section therefore, I display differing and conflictual views of tattoo artists on the matter of free Kemalist tattoos. I argue that even though Doktor’s campaign aims at organizing a nationalist sensibility and sensitivity, crossing the social boundaries in economic terms, and redefining how Turkish citizens communicate their anxieties and uneasiness towards current politics in Turkey, it, on the contrary, engenders more cultural and symbolic boundaries. I have shown these engendered cultural distinctions through looking at how tattoo artists, the creators of these identity signifiers, perceive the intentional amalgamation of their profession and political life in Turkey. The trivialization and mass production of Kemalist tattoos, I argue, results not only in the loss of the images’

meaning—transforms them into a designator and distincter of people’s social status—but also a mislaying of the tattoo makers’ status as artists, who strive for originality and artistic recognition of their craftiness. Scrutinizing this political controversy among the field of tattoo art, therefore, provides a crucial platform for analyzing the social implications of free Kemalist tattoos. I now, turn from tattooists’ to tattoo bearers—citizens, who inscribe their bodies with powerful signifiers of Kemalist ideology.

5.0 UNPACKING IDENTITIES IN THE MODERN TURKISH CONTEXT

He is very important for me. I got this tattoo with great enthusiasm and desire. I want tattoos of Atatürk all over my left arm... His portrait, the Turkish flag, him on the battlefield... also, the front page of Hürriyet⁶ on November 10th, 1938.

I like many political leaders like Atatürk. Castro... And Hitler. I like him; he was a smart man. Some people would misunderstand me now. But he was a good leader. He fought for the most powerful nation in the world. Turkey should be like that. We are always in the backstage somewhere, used by other countries. Turkey should always be at the top and the best. The only way for that seems to be discrimination and racism. So be it.

“Hey sociologist, let’s go, keep me company.” I get up immediately from my chair and follow Can to the bank, where he needs to run an errand for the tattoo parlor. He is assertive, skilled at talking to people on business matters. He is also a ‘gentleman’, who holds the door for me and does not let me pay for my food and drink. 17-year-old Can comes to the parlor straightaway from school everyday at 1:30 pm. Other tattooists greet him cheerfully. They light their cigarettes, stir their Turkish teas to melt the sugar, put on the new song of Nicki Minaj⁷ and enjoy a usual afternoon of waiting for customers and hanging out at the parlor.

The two quotes above reflect Can’s feelings about being a Turkish citizen, a notion that “Atatürk made possible,” according to him. Having already fifteen tattoos on his body, Can proudly shows off his Atatürk signature tattoo above his elbow and confirms that this is the first tattoo that he shows to other people: “I feel proud to carry this on my body, it is a privilege. This is not like wearing a t-shirt that has a flag on it. You start wearing the shirt when you are 15 and it stops to fit you at some point. Tattoo is on your body for the rest of your life; it fits you forever on your skin.” For Can, having the tattoo does not only reflect his pride, but also is a way to mark himself as an individual, permanently as a Turk. Like Can, most people in İzmir put emphasis on the tattoo’s visibility to others, which not only

⁶ Hürriyet (meaning, Independence) is one of the major newspapers in Turkey.

⁷ An American female rap artist.

augments the public appearance of such a meaningful political symbol, but also shows that—free or not—Kemalist tattoos today, are mass produced and seemingly took a shape of a collective political statement. However, many of my encounters and conversations with İzmirian people also reveal that this collective act goes beyond its reactionary characteristic and contradicts not only the way scholars usually discuss the social implications of tattooing as a field of art, but also how tattooists themselves perceive their vocation.

In this section, I discuss detailed verbal and bodily statements of tattoo bearers in terms of how they intend to communicate their Kemalist tattoos in their respective social environment. Through these ways of (mis)communication, I argue that although having Kemalist tattoos might be expected to evoke the basic assumption of paying respect, showing love, and cherishing the legacy of Atatürk, the act of getting a Kemalist tattoo transcends the idea of marking a social, political or any group identity (Turner 1999), consolidates one's sense of place (Goffman 1969) or in other words, one's position in a social space (Bourdieu 1984) and engenders a certain social, political and gendered subjectivity that highlights how people perceive the secular vs. Islamist state in Turkey.

5.1 Political Reaction or Self-fashioning?: Kemalist Tattoo Bearers

Can, a 17-year-old high school student, is the son of Doktor, who taught him tattooing in less than a year. He spreads the word about Kemalist tattoos in his high school and to his social circle every day. With little experience, Can practices his handiwork on his own peers, tattooing Atatürk signatures on their bodies. He enjoys tattooing more than painting or drawing on a piece of paper, because it is “more exciting; you do not have the freedom to make any mistake on the skin, you have to get it right the first time.” Can is also an Atatürk signature tattoo bearer, done by his father's girlfriend Pinar, who works at Köprüaltı as one of the tattooists. As much as he takes pride in carrying this mark on his skin, he also does not hesitate to express his cynicism: “Who cares about you? You know of Erdoğan, but does he

know you, does he see you? No. You get this tattoo as a reactionary act and it is left unnoticed. Not many people know about your tattoo. People who read and write about it; yes. Like Yılmaz Özdil...” Expressing his cynicism, Can shows his belief and awareness—what Doktor saw as a requisite to carry this tattoo—but at the same time, perceives the practice “realistically,” as he calls himself. For him, the purpose of the tattoo should be a stirring reaction. Here, he reveals his view that opposes with his father’s: Visibility of the tattoo is key for Can. He expects not only his Kemalist tattoo to be seen, but also—as he previously states—Turkey to be ‘seen’ by the rest of the world. He therefore, treats his tattoo in a similar fashion as he discerns his nationality. The Kemalist tattoo then, becomes a token of Can’s political subjectivity, even though it remains unrecognized.

When I ask Can if any of his friends also have Kemalist tattoos, he says, “Of course! And I did most of them. But you see, they won’t tell you what I just did. They are so *unaware* of the seriousness of the situation. They are not interested in politics as I am.” Indeed, Kaan and Altay, Can’s two high school friends, who are both Kemalist tattoo bearers, bluntly say that they do not follow the news. Altay, recently turned 18 years old, finds my questions odd and remarks that everyone should assume and acknowledge the greatness of Atatürk: “His signature says it all. What else can I say? Carrying this tattoo is an honor and a duty; it shows my braveness that I can defend my country.” For Altay and also Kaan, who mostly nods to his friend’s remarks, utilizing their body to convey their sympathy towards Atatürk and his ideals, equates to their understanding of a political act: “This is just like doing your military service,” adds Kaan, who came to the café with a copy of Adolf Hitler’s “Mein Kampf” (My Struggle). Thus, this bodily inscription not only reifies their love and respect for Atatürk, but more importantly, shapes their understanding of resisting against the power apparatuses that are in the hands of the Islamist government. Bourdieu (1985) stresses that “it is possible... to provoke a grouping on the basis of links of national identity” rather than within the economic

field. The fact that many people in İzmir get these tattoos for free, therefore, shows that it is *not* a legitimization of their economic status, but of their status that is heavily shaped by their nationalist sentiments.

As DeMello (2000) and many other scholars indicate, body modifications like tattooing are ways of signifying both an individual identity and a group affiliation. For Can and many other tattoo bearers, talking about their Kemalist tattoos become a self-reflexive act, which is a way for them to situate their bodily appearances and differences—in this case, their modified bodies with Kemalist inscriptions—among their respective community. Such bodily markers, as Crossley (2001) argues, “become tokens of physical capital... shaping both life trajectories and, in this way, habits” (6). Can, Altay, and Kaan, all fairly young citizens, intensify their ‘habit’ of expressing love and respect for Atatürk through a permanent bodily inscription that not only signifies their young bodies as Kemalist ones, but also lead them to a certain life trajectory that will determine their future position in the social context in terms of their political affiliation.

Before moving further into a discussion of conceptualizing Kemalist tattoos and the intricacies of carrying these tattoos on the skin, it is necessary to briefly point out another aspect of Kemalist tattoos. Featherstone (1982) argues, “In recent decades people have become increasingly preoccupied with the appearance, size, shape, texture and performance of their bodies. This has been encouraged by the centrality of the body in consumer culture” (Featherstone *in* Shilling 2003:182). Indeed, the body is now a frame for exhibiting identities. Can deliberately modifies his body by inscribing—and in a way consuming—a commodified and mass produced symbol of Kemalism, which thusly makes use of his physical capital—his body, in order to obtain and maintain a symbolic capital—his Kemalist body inscription. The tattooed body then, goes beyond incorporating him/herself to a certain group identity, and puts forth a certain social distinction with appearing and presenting the self differently.

This social distinction that tattoo bearers claim is one that is not only charged with a nationalist and reactionary self-positioning among the everyday life of Turkish citizens, but also convey a certain individuality that is constructed by the mass consumer culture surrounding them. Once again, referring to Orend and Gagné (2009), “the way corporate construction of reality has seeped its ways into public consciousness and, indeed, for some, physical bodies, with identity, community, and lifestyle...” (509), the commodification and mass production of Kemalist tattoos and their consumption both highlight one’s lifestyle, self-fashioning, and social status and also communicate the in depth meaning of the Kemalist—laicist and nationalist—ideology. Billig (1995) puts forth his compelling term ‘banal nationalism’ and states that nationalism not always needs an active agent to manifest itself; that it is daily reminded and “this reminding is so familiar, so continual... The metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag which is being consciously waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building” (8). The trivialization of this powerful symbol therefore, intertwines the practice of tattooing Kemalist images and its reactionary purpose with a less unnoticed and embedded distinction of the self among the social space. It is then, through this deep embeddedness into everyday life and more importantly, on ordinary bodies that Kemalism is communicated.

5.2 An Ideology of ‘the Turk’, Materialized on Gendered and Secular Bodies

Köprüaltı Tattoo is not only a favored shop for piercings and tattoos, but it is also a popular space to socialize. The tattooists welcome their customers and friends who visit time to time by offering tea, coffee, cigarettes, and cookies. National politics is a major topic of conversation in the parlor; customers and tattooists engage in heated discussions about what was on the news that day about the prime minister or another politician, and they never shy away from harshly criticizing the government. Therefore, stumbling upon a dialogue of intense condemnation is never really difficult at Köprüaltı. I go upstairs, climbing carefully

the wobbly ladder, where tattooists work on their customers. Pınar, a 24-year-old tattooist, is only an apprentice at the parlor. As soon as I greet Pınar, her customer Seher, and her friend Gamze, who is accompanying Seher in getting a tattoo, they go back to chatting and the topic strikes me immediately: “They deliberately wave their Apo⁸ flags, PKK flags; there was not a single Turkish flag there! No, kanka⁹, those Kurdish dogs, who live in the mountains are not my brothers and sisters!” Seher refers to the Newruz celebrations at Diyarbakır that was recently on the news that marked the beginning of the peace process with the PKK with a public letter from Öcalan that was read out loud to the crowd in Diyarbakır that day.

Seher and Gamze, both in their late 20s, do not hesitate asserting their hatred towards Kurds, their criticism about the peace process, and the Islamist government that initiated the peace talks with PKK after many decades of violent conflict. After telling me that they both will get Atatürk signature tattoos, Seher says: “We should all carry this tattoo on our bodies. No matter what, I do not care if they hang me or cut off my tattooed arm. This is not like any other tattoo. It fits us.” She, just like Can and Melih, appropriates her body appearance and perceives the tattoo as a necessary mark that ‘fits’ her body, which is deeply embedded with her nationalist sentiments. Pınar then, slightly changes the topic, which reveals these three women’s perception of their bodies even to a greater extent. She raises her voice and utters, “We are women, and they push the veil into our faces. I do not want to veil, because they want us to. I can do whatever *I* want to my body!” Pınar, as a bearer of multiple tattoos, including an Atatürk signature one, stresses on her own agency as a woman that is elevated through her resistant body. Göle (1996), in her ethnography on veiling in Turkey, highlights the significance of this female agency in relation to Western modernism that “it takes the human body in the spiral of *secularization* (emphasis added) and aims to increase the domination of human willpower over the body” (1996:135). For Pınar, and also for Seher and

⁸ Nickname of Abdullah Öcalan, one of the founders of the PKK (Kurdish Workers’ Party), who is sentenced to life imprisonment in 1999 after his arrest

⁹ An informal way of saying ‘blood brother’—can be similar to ‘bro’ or ‘dude’ in English language.

Gamze, resisting against the subjugation of their bodies is directly related to their Kemalist and laicist—as opposed to Islamist—principles. For Turkish female subjects, a covered/veiled female body that according to Göle (1996) symbolizes female piety and modesty should stay on the individual and private level. Today however, veiling has become highly politicized and shifted to the public realm that accentuates the political power relations and domination over female bodies. This dichotomy of secularized and self-determined body and the Islamist, veiled, and dominated body signifies a great female identity puzzle in Turkey today.

You have to be conscious and determined about what you believe in and who you are as an individual. Once you lose your understanding of where you come from and who brought you here, then you are vulnerable for their mind games. When you lose your ability to defend yourself, you get lost. They brainwash you. Next thing you know, you're wearing a veil, because of that.

Gamze's statement again, reveals the significance of situating one's self in that person's surrounding social space. Secular women like Pınar, Seher, and Gamze, who identify as modern, Western, and progressive, perceive themselves as rational actors. And this rationality "exercises its will to tame and master the human body" (Göle 1996:18). Going back to Bourdieu, he argues, "actors are socialized into a *habitus*, into a set of dispositions and orientations that do not simply 'regulate' their actions, but define just who and what they are" (Bohman in Shusterman 1999:130). Therefore, the social actor in making decisions so as to position him/herself in the social sphere, relies on habitus that brings in a sense of practical agency. Taking control of their body, making claims that they have the authority to present themselves in appearance according to their will therefore, is the primary argument here for my female Kemalist tattoo bearer informants. Göle (1996) specifically states, "Any blurring between the feminine and the masculine roles, especially the physical masculinization of women, is considered a transgression" (19). Pınar, Seher, and Gamze, in a way, masculinize their bodies with multiple tattoos and piercings that are far from reflecting female piety and femininity. Looking further in Bourdieu's terms, this 'symbolic power' that these Kemalist

tattoos bring to them and to their bodies, is “the power to make things seen and to make things believed, to produce and impose the legitimate classification” (Bourdieu 1985:209). Pinar highlights the visibility of the tattoo on her arm—unlike Melih—and this visibility and the symbolic power the tattoo brings in on her body contributes to her deliberate political resistance against the government, which makes way for her to legitimize her position both as a woman with free will and as a Kemalist with secular and modernist thoughts.

Therefore, just as Islamic identity, specifically female identity, “searches for its ‘authenticity’ and distinction, Westernized and Kemalist women seek for signifying distinctions that are visible, materialized on the body, and ultimately transgressive. Such subversive and deliberate act of opening, inscribing, and making the body visible, rather than covering it up with a veil for these women, is not only liberating, but also empowering. Gizem, a 22-year-old college student, also confirms this while at the same time blames the whole population in Turkey for the status quo: “Just like they show off their precious veils in public, I will express my stance through my body as well... Our nation is responsible for these people and how powerful they have become, no one else.” Hence, these female bodies become symbols of resistance, a notion that Foucault writes extensively on. Foucault, according to Butler (1989), adopts his genealogical approach to the body from Nietzsche and “conceives the body as a surface and a set of subterranean ‘forces’ that are repressed and transmuted by a mechanism of cultural construction external to that body” (1989:602). Even though Foucault argues that these external forces are ‘subterranean’—in other words, concealed or may not be noticed easily—they nonetheless, impact bodies in a way that may transform or modify it in certain ways.

Kemalist tattoo bearers, male or female, utilize their bodies to put forth not only their social status as Kemalist and secularist among the wider social space, but also their free will

and agency by adopting a powerful, permanent, and meaningful practice. This transgressive act of tattooing Kemalist symbols makes way to explore people's expression of their identity and understanding of political acts in Turkey.

5.3 Acquiring Statuses, Reifying Secularist Masculinities

Melih, a 53-year-old 'biker' is one of the frequent visitors at the parlor. He engages in every conversation in the parlor, sitting, observing customers, gazing at the passers-by, and enjoys a few hours of relaxation.

I actually did not come here today to get this tattoo; Can was available, so why not? I certainly am not getting this tattoo to show off. This is not for other people to see. Whoever needs to know me, they already do. I am going to carry it, because *I* want to. I want it for *myself*. Just like the other one [referring to his 'Ideas are bulletproof' tattoo—a line from the movie *V for Vendetta*].

A member of the 'Kartallar Motorsiklet Klübü' (Eagles Motorcycle Club), just like Doktor, Melih wears a similar leather jacket with pins that reflect his dedication to Beşiktaş soccer team. He spontaneously decides to get an Atatürk signature tattoo and declares what such a body inscription means to him. He directly emphasizes on the significance of its value to the individual, rather than its visibility. As discussed previously, such prominence of the individualistic character of Kemalist tattoos conveys a certain positioning of the self among the social context, which in the case of Turkey is one that is heavily charged with political uncertainties and distrust towards the current Islamist government.

This uncertain political situation, stemming from the interruption of one of the most fundamental ideological notions of Kemalism, which is the notion of the laicist state, inclines Turkish citizens, unlike Melih, to remind their social surroundings that they are still dedicated believers to the Kemalist state through their bodily appearances. As Tayyip Erdoğan's government extends its Islamist policies, Turkish citizens' secularist sensibilities are hurt, which urges them to act against it and people like Melih, feel the urgent need to voice their dissent. But more importantly, as Melih confirms, this act of deliberate body modification, loaded with a political message, is also a reminder to the self; a confirmation to the individual

of his/her own self-awareness. Thus, the Kemalist tattoo, considered as a form of symbolic capital, makes way for the individual to strengthen his/her status within the respective social space. Taking a Bourdieuan analytical stance, therefore, Kemalist tattoo bearers utilize these tattoos as a powerful capital or resource, so as to maintain their social status acquired through a cultural capital, which denotes to “a culturally-specific ‘competence’—as a ‘resource’ or a ‘power’—in a particular social setting... [which is] inculcated [by] the family and the school” (Weininger *in* Wright 2005:122). These two social agencies that determine one’s cultural capital is certainly significant in the ways many of my informants situate themselves in their national context.

Turkish citizens are born into not only a powerful discourse on the utmost importance of Kemal Atatürk’s personality, achievements, and reforms, but also visual presence of him in statues, images surrounding them in their private homes and public schools. Melih, the son of an army soldier, for instance, stresses on how going to Anıtkabir¹⁰ was one of the first and most significant experiences that shaped his understanding of the history of the country and was a crucial basis of his love and respect towards Atatürk. Along with the teachings of the history of how Republic of Turkey came into being, commemorative acts (Connerton 1989) like paying a visit to Anıtkabir, which can be considered as a site of memory (Nora 1989), also shapes every school child’s sympathy towards Atatürk. Embedded through upbringing, hearing oral histories of the Republican era from their elders, and official Turkish history education at schools, the majority of social actors in Turkey are molded into citizens, who sympathize and defend Kemalist ideals. Bourdieu’s widely used concept of ‘habitus’ therefore, goes to play a major role in this construction of sympathy and subscription to the Kemalist ideology. According to him, habitus is “a structuring structured structure” which “comprises a system of dispositions which generate perceptions, appreciations and practices”

¹⁰ Mausoleum of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk that is frequently visited by Turkish citizens, especially school children.

(Maton *in* Grenfell 2008:51). Structured “by one’s past and present circumstances” and structuring because it continuously changes and re-changes “one’s present and future practices” (51), habitus, coupled with one’s cultural capital makes way for the actor’s individual agency to act upon certain decisions. In looking at the social implications of tattooing Kemalist symbolisms, therefore, people like 17-year-old Can or 53-year-old Melih situate themselves as part of a certain status that denotes ultimately to a “class habitus” (93).

Melih adds this to his remarks: “...after learning in school, being able to grasp the importance of his reforms, gaining that consciousness, and defending his ideals all depends on the self.” Hence, he again, reiterates the agency of the self. Going back to Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984), Turkish citizens make use of their acquired cultural capital in “constructing [their] view of the social world” (Bourdieu 1985:200). This constructed and continuously reproduced perception of their social context is therefore, embodied in symbols like the tattoos of Atatürk’s signature, a small photo of him carried in wallets, or an expensive handmade painting of his portrait neatly hung in living rooms. Bourdieu argues that “rationality is socially bounded” (Weininger *in* Wright 2005:120), which implicates that actors define and make choices to adopt a practice respective to their specific social contexts. Melih, therefore, as a Kemalist tattoo bearer, a social actor that acts on a certain practice, is driven with a rationality that is constituted by his cultural capital—one that heavily emphasizes his nationalist sentiments.

Melih is the son and grandson of soldiers and identifies his family as “a family of soldiers.” As every other Turkish man, he tells me, he also served in the army and he perceives the military as “a necessary and essential part of our nation.” Melih shows off his muscular and rugged ‘biker’ appearance, which is complemented by his high opinion of Turkey being “a military nation.” Altınay (2004), in her ethnographic study, investigates this exact notion of Turkey and its powerful militaristic identity by acknowledging that “the

military [is] a key and sacred institution in Turkish society and the idea that every male Turk is born a soldier” (1). When I reiterate this idea to Melih, he nods heavily, but leaves expressing his opinion through his bodily composure; spreading his chest wide and taking his left fist to his heart. Military service is then, also incorporated in Melih’s habitus as his close proximity to the institution in his family has shaped his understanding of a Turkish male subjectivity.

To go further into the close linkage between masculinity and nationalism, Cem, a 26-year-old İstanbulian would be a case in point. He lights his cigarette as we sit down at one of the most popular cafés in Kadıköy, İstanbul, ordering a cup of tea for me immediately, without asking. Like Melih, he also comes from a family of soldiers: “My grandfather is a navy captain in the Turkish army, I basically grew up at the military base.” The presence of the military in Cem’s life therefore, is so accentuated and he confirms this by saying that he did his military service in Syria as a sublieutenant in the ‘special operations’ division and adding that he asked his grandfather to deliberately “pull some strings” to put him in that division. He defines the army as a space that different people from different places come together and form a single community:

It was quite difficult... I went to so many operations in the eastern region... one of them was to stop drug smugglers. I also killed two terrorists. I had a difficult time to go back to my normal self. But it was a wonderful and courageous experience. I would do it again, if needed.

Here, Cem perceives the experience as both difficult and wonderful. For him, being in the army made him “a better Turkish man.” He regards this experience as a great resource for who he is and indeed, his masculine subjectivity is revealed not only through how he verbally expresses his opinion about being a Turk, but also through his bodily dispositions.

McClintock (1993) states that “all nations depend on powerful constructions of gender” and “despite nationalisms’ ideological investment in the idea of popular unity, nations have historically amounted to the sanctioned institutionalization of gender

difference” (61). Cem points out that every Turkish man is a ‘gentleman’; they are modest and well mannered. Turkish men according to him do not discriminate women and do not perceive them as merely sexual objects; “We treat women as gentlemen, this is how we are all taught” he says. He therefore, situates Turkish men in a distinctive category besides any men from another nationality. Yet, he still marks a difference between men and women when he further comments on being in the army: “Ah, that is something that no woman can grasp. You have to be a man if you really want to know what being a Turkish soldier means.” Thus, he marks a clear-cut distinction between the two genders.

In discussing his masculinity and nationality together as highly intertwined points of identification, Cem’s distinctive remarks reveal that Turkish nationalism like any other nationalism is “typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation, and masculinized hope” (Enloe *in* McClintock 1989: 62). Cem is the tattoo bearer of not one, but two Atatürk signatures, a “K.Atatürk” one and his signature before he adopted the name Atatürk, “Gazi (Veteran) Mustafa Kemal”. He discerns Atatürk as a paternal figure, as he claims that he learned Atatürk’s name before learning his own father’s name when he was a child. “I believe that Atatürk was sent to us as an angel by God,” says Cem as he shows his first Atatürk signature tattoo next to a figure of what he calls “an angel’s feather.” Telling me that he got the second tattoo of “Gazi Mustafa Kemal” signature when he was on leave from the military, it is apparent that Cem’s Kemalist sentiments are greatly elevated throughout his experience as a Turkish soldier. In Cem and in many other Turkish men’s memory lies Atatürk’s paternal image and as a man of today’s Turkey, Cem identifies himself and the category of Turkish men as righteous, gentlemen, modern, and egalitarian. Thus, Cem, using many adjectives that describe what a man is denotes to a certain kind of ‘normative masculinity’ that Mosse (1996) defines. It includes “willpower, honor, courage, discipline... independence, sexual virility tempered with restraint, and dignity” (Nagel 1998: 245). All

these characteristics play into the revealing Cem's subjectivity, through his outward appearance and his verbal expression of inward virtue as a man.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The campaign that Doktor initiated in 2007 is still going strongly; people come to Köprüaltı Tattoo parlor everyday to carry Atatürk on their bodies permanently. Doktor, an idiosyncratic character, who is passionate about many things in life, feels the need to make an effort to “not let our father down.” He refers to Atatürk and Turkish citizens’ duty to protect his Turkey from the hands of conservatism and Islamism. He does this by utilizing the only profession he has: tattooing. By giving away free tattoos, Doktor aims to cross the economic inequalities of people and allows people from all demographics to have a bodily inscription of Atatürk. Marking themselves with his image, Turkish citizens not only reify, but also deify Atatürk. A tattooed self indicates a modern, Westernized one; hence, a Kemalist tattooed self is one that engenders new micro-level boundaries not just collectively, but also on the individual level.

Tattoo artists mark their own categories for how a tattoo should be perceived and who should have it. Artists like Peri, Keni, Azimet, and Anıl situate themselves outside of the campaign and defend this position they actively choose by claiming that tattooing for free—be it an Atatürk tattoo or any other one—distorts their profession’s artistic quality. Considering tattooing as an art form, they safeguard their field by not participating in the campaign as many other tattoo parlors all around Turkey have joined Köprüaltı’s practice. These differing positionalities among tattoo artists point to this: Free Kemalist tattoos and their mass production seemingly trivialize not only tattooing as a field of practice and as a distinctive label that marks individuality, but also Atatürk’s image and what he stands for, which ultimately leads the Kemalist ideology disintegrate into an exclusive social category that through tattooing, literally marks and unmarks citizens from each other.

In looking at Kemalism as a social category—one that is heavily reliant on bodily appearances in the context of Turkey, Kemalist tattoo bearers reveal that such categorization feeds from and projects itself towards, at the same time, other ones, like ethnic or gendered boundaries. Tattoo bearers like Can, Melih, Pinar, Seher, Gamze, and Cem may seemingly share the same view about Atatürk's importance and they may all feel the necessity to locate themselves as Kemalists through their bodies. However, every tattoo bearer, despite the similarity of the habituses, appropriate their tattoos to their own advantage and utilize the Kemalist category that they situate themselves in, so as to accentuate other social categories: Pinar, Seher, and Gamze, as Turkish secular and modernized women, Can as someone, who believes in the necessity of eradication of the Kurdish ethnicity, and Melih and Cem, as highly secularist and militaristic men, who portray their masculinity through their military experience. Every subject therefore, employs their tattoos to engender their subjectivities that are heavily entrusted to Kemalism, and clarify their other categorical statuses through an overarching—but specific to Turkey—Kemalist category. In this thesis, therefore, I have demonstrated that Kemalism, an amalgamation of many ideologies, encompasses people's everyday lives, how they connect with national politics, and in the case of Kemalist tattooing, simply how they look.

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