

THE ORGANIZATION OF WHITE-COLLARS IN ISTANBUL:
INTIMACY, LABOR AND POLITICS

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2014

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Thesis submitted to the
Institute for Graduate Studies in the Social Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
Sociology

by
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Boğaziçi University

2014

Thesis Abstract

Mehmet Fatih Tatari, “The Organization of White-Collars in Istanbul: Intimacy,
Labor and Politics”

This thesis aims to analyze the recent mobilization of *white-collars* in Istanbul after the 2008 economic crisis, by placing it within the context of the institutionalization of a precarious labor regime for lower level managerial workers. Following the organization of *white-collars* around *Plaza Eylem Platformu* (Plaza Action Platform), I analyze the production of knowledge about corporations by and among lower level managers; together with the managerial tools and mechanisms, which attempt to count, accumulate and/or manage affective economy of laboring in corporations. By depicting the managerial control mechanisms in corporations and their interventions in the affective states of workers, I argue that the managerial mechanisms (Human Resources Management apparatus in particular) displacing the control in corporations onto the social relations at work, attempt to capture affective investments of workers in their labor through penetrating the intimate relation they establish with their work. Finally, I analyze the formation of *white-collars*’ political subjectivity in the meetings and workshops of the platform which are taken to be a new channel in the affective economy of laboring where workers publicize the hidden working conditions, share their intimate relations to laboring mediated by the human resources techniques and construct a new ‘intimate’ space among workers against the management.

Tez Özeti

Mehmet Fatih Tatari, “İstanbul’da Beyaz Yakalıların Örgütlenmesi: Mahremiyet, Emek ve Siyaset”

Bu tezin amacı 2008 ekonomik krizinin ardından, alt düzey idari çalışanlar için güvencesiz bir emek rejiminin kurumsallaşması bağlamında İstanbul’daki beyaz yakalı örgütlenmesi incelemektir. Bu çalışmada Plaza Eylem Platformu etrafında örgütlenen beyaz yakalıları odaklanarak, bu işçiler arasında ve onlar tarafından şirketler hakkında üretilen bilgiyi; ve bununla birlikte şirketlerdeki emeğin duygulanım ekonomisini ölçülebilir hale getirmeye idare etmeye teşebbüs eden idari araç ve mekanizmaları inceliyorum. Şirketlerdeki kontrol mekanizmalarını ve bunların işçilerin duygulanım hallerine müdahalelerini betimliyorum. Özellikle de şirketlerde emek sürecinin denetimini toplumsal ilişkilere havale eden mekanizmaların (özel olarak İnsan Kaynakları Yönetimi aygıtının), işçilerin yaptıkları işle kurdukları mahrem ilişkilere sızarak işçilerin kendi emeklerine yaptıkları duygulanımsal yatırımları ele geçirmeye teşebbüs ettiklerini iddia ediyorum. Son olarak, işçilerin gizli kalması gereken iş koşullarını ve insan kaynakları tekniklerinin dolayımıldığı işle kurdukları yakın ilişkileri paylaştıkları platform toplantılarını ve atölyelerini *beyaz yakalıların* siyasi öznelliklerinin oluşumunda yeni kurucu bir alan olarak inceliyorum.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank several people without whom I would not have been able to write this thesis. First of all I would like to thank to my thesis advisor Ceren Özselçuk for her endless support and patience throughout my research and writing process. Together with her invaluable advices and criticisms, I will never forget her eagerness to support me whenever I needed. Nükhet Sirman has always been a source of inspiration for me, since my undergraduate years, with her distinctive insights and wise comments. I owe very much to her for her genuine support and intellectual guidance. I would like to thank Yahya Madra and Şemsa Özar both for their valuable comments to this text and for helping me find my way after having graduated from economics.

I have to thank people I encountered in Istanbul Bilgi University during my assistantship for the last three years. Especially Aydın Uğur whose intellectual guidance was invaluable for me, taught me a lot not only about social sciences but also about life with his warm support and wise sayings. I also owe much to my friends Amed, Deniz and Zeynep with whom we did much more than making the work bearable for ourselves.

I am very much indebted to the unforgettable friendships I had in the course of writing this thesis. Many thanks for their companionship to Derya, Ezgi, Selim, Gökhan, Burcu, Mesut the ‘colleague’, and Yusuf the generous host. My friendships with Osman, Zeynel, Fahrettin, Memin, Alperen, Burcu, M. Talha, Sinan, Eylem, Ebru, Sinem, Eda and Goncagül were very valuable for me in different parts of this journey. And special thanks to Orkun, Barış, Cevren, Bilgesu, Sidar, Duygu, Emre Can, and Deniz for their presence in my life, which made many other things possible while finishing this thesis.

I am grateful to my family for their endless and affectionate support. Without the seriousness of my father, silent wisdom of my mother, joyful and excited interventions of my sister, and warmheartedness of my maternal grandmother I would not never be able to make it.

Finally, I want to present my gratitude to all my informants, friends and everyone in *Plaza Eylem* who shared with me their thoughts and feelings. It is their story which made up this thesis.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION	1
Introduction	1
(Corporate) Labor Market in Turkey	2
Field and Method	13
Overview of Chapters	17
 CHAPTER II. MOBILIZATION OF WHITE-COLLARS AND PRECARIOUS LABOR REGIME IN TURKEY	 19
Introduction	19
Who Are The <i>White-Collars</i> ?	21
Conceptualizing White Collar Labor and Subjectivity	26
Immaterial Labor and Management	31
Intimacy and Labor	36
Subjectivity and Affective Surplus	45
Conclusion.....	48
 CHAPTER III. INTIMACY AND CONTROL AT WORK	 49
Introduction	49
To be appropriate for a particular job	52
Performance Appraisal Meetings	58
Anxiety and Inadequacy	64
Keep it private!	69
Mobbing	75
Fear and Firing	80
 CHAPTER IV. TRANSGRESSION AND POLITICAL SUBJECTIVITY	 88
Introduction	88
Plaza actions and formation of the platform	88
‘Experience sharing’ as an organizational glue	92
Affect and Political Subjectivity	98
Transgressive Jouissance	102
Intimate Space of the Platform	106
Solidarity and Labor Movement	110
 CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION	 116
 APPENDIX	 122
 BIBLIOGRAPHY	 123

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This thesis aims to analyze the recent mobilization of *white-collars* in Istanbul after the 2008 economic crisis, by placing it within the context of the institutionalization of a precarious labor regime for lower level managerial workers. The formation of workers' subjectivities in relation with the specific type of labor they perform and organize around is the fundamental focus of analysis of the thesis. To this end the corporate labor market and control mechanisms in corporations will be analyzed from the perspective of the affective economy of laboring. This analysis is an attempt to depict managerial control displaced onto the social relations at work. The intimate relation that every worker establishes with his/her work becomes the ground through which the sociality at work can be managed and affective investments of the workers in their labor can be captured in corporations.

During and after the protests in the end of May and the first two weeks of June 2013 in Istanbul, widely referred as Gezi uprising, "white-collars" were one of the groups that received much discussion in the social media. Though many accounts ignored the working conditions of these workers, their participation to the protests has been an important topic of discussion. Some claimed that this group contributed to the middle-class character of the uprising, others mentioned these professionals to explain how the social media and new technologies that enabled mass protests were

heavily used in contemporary qualified jobs. Although these explanations are not totally wrong, the argument of this thesis urges the reader to take into account the conditions under which the relation of these *white-collars* with street protests has been shaped before this uprising through their working conditions and labor processes. In other words, my research on a recently formed white-collar labor organization, *Plaza Eylem Platformu* (Plaza Action Platform) reveals the ways in which these workers have been trying to organize and become visible before June 2013. However, this thesis is not about all the “white-collars” who participated to the protests, nor does it claim that *white-collars* organizing already gave the sign to anticipate the uprising. Rather it offers important links between the forms of protests in June 2013 and *white-collars*’ self-organization that preceded it, a topic which I will return in the conclusion.

This study should also be considered as an inquiry into the particular segment of labor movement, namely the recently emerged *white-collar* movement. In this regard, it reveals both the specifics of the laboring in lower level managerial positions of corporations, and the knowledge and culture that the workers generate in their self-organization. It can be considered as a modest attempt to contribute to the literature which focuses on the agency of workers. I aim to illuminate the formation of particular worker subjectivities through focusing indigenous worker tactics, strategies and practices, establishment of relations of solidarity, and cultural practices.

(Corporate) Labor Market in Turkey

The recent increase in *white-collar* jobs, and the transformation of the employment regime in the private sector in Turkey has recently started to be discussed from the

perspective of the lower level white-collars who increasingly experience job insecurity¹. Yıldırım Şentürk states that the growing social sciences literature on professionals and their work life in Istanbul have been analyzing this group of laborers in three different ways with different emphases: in terms of ‘middle classes’, ‘professionals’, and ‘white collars’². Analyses on middle classes usually approach the issue from the lifestyles of these groups, their consumption practices, their preference in the housing market (e.g. gated communities), political aspirations and how they distinguish themselves from other urban dwellers³. Those who focus directly on the work life of professionals usually emphasize globalization, its agents as high-ranked executive managers employed in big multinational corporations and the constitution of “managerial business elite” or “transnational capitalist class” or “golden collar subjectivities”⁴. Lastly studies that emphasize the deterioration of working conditions, mobbing practices, increasing insecurity and precarisation in the context of work life of office workers usually make use of the term ‘white-collars’⁵.

Şentürk argues that “the white-collar” as an ambiguous term cannot be made a

¹ Tanıl Bora et al., *Boşuna Mı Okuduk? Türkiye’de Beyaz Yakalı İşsizliği (Did We Study for Nothing?*

² Yıldırım Şentürk, “İstanbul’da Şirketler Dünyasının Profesyonelleri (Professionals of the World of Corporations in Istanbul),” *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 126 (2013), pp. 64–97.

³ Seçil Doğuç, “Yeni Orta Sınıfın Gözünden Zenginlik ve Yoksulluk (Richness and Poverty from the Perspective of the New Middle Class),” *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 104 (2005), pp. 73–91; Ayfer Bartu Candan and Biray Kolluoğlu, “Emerging Spaces of Neoliberalism: A Gated Town and a Public Housing Project in Istanbul,” *New Perspectives on Turkey*, no. 39 (2008), pp. 5–47; Hatice Kurtuluş, Orta Sınıfın Sosyo-Mekansal Yeniden İnşası (Socio-Spatial Re-constitution of the Middle Class), interview by Asya Deşen, *Express*, 127, pp.10-13, 2012; Cenk Saraçoğlu, “İzmirli Orta-Sınıfta Kürt Algısı: Mekan, Sınıf ve Kentsel Yaşam (The Middle Class Perception of Kurds in Izmir: Space, Class and Urban Life),” *Praksis*, no. 21 (2010), pp. 17–47.

⁴ Sezai Ozan Zeybek, “Human Enterprise of Global Capitalism and the Golden Collars: Producing the Producer” (master's thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2006); Deniz İlhan, “Turkish Transnational Business Professionals in Istanbul: Globalization, Cosmopolitanism and the Emerging Elite” (master's thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2010).

⁵ Işıklı, “Ofis Çalışanlarının Yalnızlığı (The Loneliness of Office Employees);” Uçarol, “Aşınan Beyaz Yaka: İstanbul’da Sigortacılar Örneği (Corrosion of White Collar: The Case of Insurers in Istanbul);” Bora et al., *Boşuna Mı Okuduk? Türkiye’de Beyaz Yakalı İşsizliği (Did We Study for Nothing? White-Collar Unemployment in Turkey)*.

consistent analytical category to study. He suggests distinguishing professionals and office workers in the world of corporations. My usage of *white-collars* in this thesis, as I will clarify in the following chapter, relies on the appropriation of the term by the workers themselves in their self-organization. In this sense, I don't use it as a generic category or an analytical concept to understand the world of corporations, but as a native concept that workers redefine and use in a particular way in the context of the changing dynamics of the corporate labor market and control mechanisms. For the purposes of this thesis, I will offer a short overview of the transformation of labor market for *white-collars* in Turkey, especially after late 1990s.

When the unionization attempt at IBM Turkey and the 'plaza actions' that initiated this research took place in 2008, workers stated that the difference between newly employed workers and the old ones was the major force behind the attempt of unionization. As Nedim Akay, the union representative who was fired in December 2008, states in an interview, IBM Turkey started to employ workers through a subcontractor after the 2001 crisis. As a result, workers who do the same job were subject to different conditions in terms of wage levels, job security, private insurance, and some other benefits provided to the old employees. The 'old' workers were also feeling insecure since the company started to fire some senior workers and forced others to sign new contracts, which transferred their employment status to the newly founded subcontractor company⁶. This deterioration of working conditions and job insecurity later fueled the unionization attempt in the company. And the case

⁶ An interview can be found at <http://www.turk-internet.com/portal/yazigoster.php?yaziid=25248>. (accessed on 10 July 2011)

of IBM also exemplified the transformation of labor market for *white-collars* in Turkey after late 1990s.

The issue of subcontracting and flexibility had been the characteristics of labor market after 1980s economic reforms in Turkey. The shift in national economic policy from import substitution to export-led growth, after the coup d'état of 12 September 1980 that violently suppressed revolutionary social movements in Turkey, entailed economic liberalization policies together with the rise of temporary and flexible employment, most often through subcontractors and commodity chains. The steady decline of the employment in agriculture in Turkey and the rise of service sector constituted the major change in the composition of labor market. Here I will focus on the labor market for *white-collars* in terms of the precarious employment regime they face in 2000s.

Tanıl Bora and Necmi Erdoğan highlight the collapse of the myth of “the New Economy” which promised pleasure in work for the qualified, educated employees who were supposed to be employed at jobs they enjoy performing⁷. Although the discourse which articulates pleasure and work still dominates contemporary management literature,⁸ in the labor market for educated candidates, from the massive layoffs in the beginning of 2000s onwards the job insecurity and precarity

⁷ Tanıl Bora and Necmi Erdoğan, “Yeni Kapitalizm, Yeni İşsizlik ve Beyaz Yakalılar (New Capitalism, New Unemployment and White Collars),” in *Boşuna Mı Okuduk? Türkiye’de Beyaz Yakalı İşsizliği (Did We Study for Nothing? White-Collar Unemployment in Turkey)* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2011), p.21.

⁸ Jacques Donzelot, “Pleasure in Work,” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Cordon Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 251–80; Nigel Thrift, *Knowing Capitalism* (London: SAGE Publications, 2005); Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London and New York: Verso, 2005); Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, *La Nouvelle Raison Du Monde: Essai Sur La Société Néolibérale (The New Way of the World: On Neoliberal Society)* (Editions La Découverte, 2010); Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Duke University Press, 2011); Andrew Ross, *Nice Work If You Can Get It: Life and Labor in Precarious Times* (New York and London: NYU Press, 2009).

became the rule for almost all of the workers except a handful of elites who are at the top of managerial hierarchies⁹. Bora and Erdoğan emphasize the disappointment of the ‘white-collars’ who found themselves in an endless search of employment and in vicious circles of unemployment after having graduated. The last two economic crises, in 2001 and 2008, made more visible the unemployment among this qualified labor force. In 2001, banking sector was highly debated with 23 bankruptcies, and this left at least forty thousand unemployed bankers¹⁰. In the aftermath of the 2008 global economic crisis, 24.9% of the unemployed were university graduates¹¹. When *Plaza Actions* were realized to support the unionization of IBM workers, hundreds of workers from different workplaces, especially multinationals¹², were also being fired due to ‘downsizing’ and ‘restructuring’ decisions of managers following the global crisis.

Bora and Erdoğan underline how this precarious nature of employment in private sector is presented as ‘freedom to choose one’s job and to change it according to new opportunities’ which becomes a ‘moral virtue’ encouraging productivity of the employees with respect to the idleness of the state functionaries¹³. Job insecurity is a relatively recent phenomenon for the educated segments of the workforce who are

⁹ Bora and Erdoğan, “Yeni Kapitalizm, Yeni İşsizlik ve Beyaz Yakalılar (New Capitalism, New Unemployment and White Collars).”, p. 31.

¹⁰ Türkiye Bankacılar Birliği, “2001 Yılında Türk Bankacılık Sistemi (Turkish Banking System in 2001)” (Bankacılar Dergisi, 2002).

¹¹ Tanıl Bora, “Herkes İşsiz Ama Seninki Farklı: Türkiye’de Beyaz Yakalı İşsizliğine Genel Bir Bakış (Everyone Is Unemployed But Yours Is Different: A General Overview of White Collar Unemployment in Turkey,” in *Boşuna Mı Okuduk? Türkiye’de Beyaz Yakalı İşsizliği (Did We Study for Nothing? White-Collar Unemployment in Turkey)*, p. 51.

¹² Massive layoffs had taken place in companies such as Vodafone, Finansbank and Akbank. Yunus Öztürk, “Biz Beyazyakalılar, Eyleme Hazırız! (We the White-Collars, Ready to Act!),” *Mesele*, Temmuz 2011.

¹³ Bora, “Herkes İşsiz Ama Seninki Farklı: Türkiye’de Beyaz Yakalı İşsizliğine Genel Bir Bakış (Everyone Is Unemployed But Yours Is Different: A General Overview of White Collar Unemployment in Turkey.)”, p. 55.

employed in private corporations. Formal employment previously meant long term employment contracts for wage laborers and provided job security for workers. However, with the decline of the ‘informal’ economy in 2000s¹⁴, the employment regime became precarious since job insecurity was also formalized in this process. The Labor Act 4857 released in 2003 is crucial in this respect¹⁵. The major change was about formalizing outsourcing under certain conditions. It restricted the main company from subcontracting its central tasks. In other words, the production of goods or services by a subcontractor could only be limited to the non-central tasks of the main employer. Although it was not the case in many sectors such as textile, shipyards or construction, where the subcontractors provide the central productive activities in various forms of informal employment, this legal change increased outsourcing in various sectors of *white-collar* jobs, where flexible forms of employment were formally institutionalized. Call centers provide the prime example in this respect, since they are considered a non-central task for many companies from banking to retail industry, from transportation to information technologies. The new labor act also included the regulation of a recent institution in the corporate labor market: ‘private employment agencies’. These agencies became increasingly important intermediaries especially for lower level managerial positions in corporations. The new regulation abolished the monopoly of İŞKUR as the public employment agency in Turkey and brought a license based functioning of private ones, which apply to İŞKUR to get a license and are regularly inspected by this public institution. The number of such agencies is 387 by June 2014 (284 of them in

¹⁴ Informal Employment decreased from 52% to 38% between 2003 and 2013
<http://www.cnnturk.com/2013/ekonomi/genel/02/26/kayitdisi.ekonomi.5.puan.geriledi/697997.0/>
(accessed on 27 February 2013)

¹⁵ <http://www.iskanunu.com/4857-sayili-is-kanunu/388-4857-sayili-is-kanunu-duz-metin> (accessed on 15 June 2011)

Istanbul), and from 2004 to 2013 they placed 291.712 employees.¹⁶ Private employment agencies were not completely new institutions in Turkey but their scope and missions were transformed from late 1990s onwards. These institutions were mostly known as ‘head hunters’ that were intermediaries for high ranking professionals – senior directors, managers, CFOs, CEOs and alike. However, with the outsourcing of mass recruitment activities, especially in banking, insurance, retail and call centers sectors, private employment agencies began to include lower level office job placements. HR professionals, who have worked in professional corporations’ recruitment departments for years, usually became founders of these agencies¹⁷. They also include the services of consulting companies, aiming to evaluate workers in a company or give seminars to the HR employees¹⁸. Their importance for our discussion is that they reveal and take part in the transformation of the (corporate) labor market both in terms of the institutionalization of precarity and in terms of human resources management techniques that are put into practice in the labor market from job recruitment processes onwards. The companies outsource mass recruitment as well as recruitment for particular projects to these agencies as a way of lowering their human resources management costs. Although it is not legally allowed, these agencies also employ workers who work for other companies for particular periods of time. In 2009, the legal change allowing the agencies to employ workers in the service of another company was not approved by the President but in the recent draft entitled ‘National Employment Strategy’, released by the Ministry

¹⁶ www.iskur.gov.tr (accessed on 15 June 2014)

¹⁷ Ebru Işıklı, Private Employment Agencies’ Role in The Making of Employability with Special Emphasis on the Job Search Process of University Educated Job Candidates in Contemporary Turkey, (Ph.D. diss., Boğaziçi University, work in progress).

¹⁸ Ibid.

of Employment and Social Security in 2013, it is stated that “The legal regulation for private employment agencies that can establish temporary work arrangements will be realized”¹⁹. The strategy includes the operationalization of the ‘active labour market’ policies (that were included in the 7th plan of development in 1996 of the Ministry of Development within the context of European Union candidacy) by deepening the relationship between employment and education together with ensuring flexibility and security simultaneously in the labor market. The well known concept of ‘flexicurity’ is used to express this paradoxical condition which emphasizes ‘employment security’ rather than particular ‘job security’ and claims that the efficiency of the labor market can only be obtained by getting rid of the strict employment relations between employers and employees. Hence, in the context of office work, the private employment agencies becomes the legal ground through which flexible, project based short term contracts can be realized and the precarity can be institutionalized. In other words, they increasingly tend to become ‘professional subcontractors’ in the world of corporations.

The above mentioned labor market conditions points to an increased job insecurity and a precarious labor regime for the formerly protected corporate employees, the so-called professional managers. The concept of precarity has been widely used at the turn of the 21th century to describe the erosion of security as a condition of life

¹⁹ Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Labor and Social Security, *Ulusal İstihdam Stratejisi Taslağı (2012-2023)* (Draft of the National Employment Strategy), (February 2012). (my translation: *Özel istihdam bürolarının geçici iş ilişkisi kurabilmelerine yönelik yasal düzenleme yapılacaktır*). For a comprehensive assessment of the document, see Ahmet Makal, ed., *Ulusal İstihdam Stratejisi: Eleştirel Bir Bakış (National Employment Strategy: A Critical Approach)* (Ankara: Türkiye İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu TÜRK-İŞ, 2012).

for workers in the industrialized West²⁰. Beyond the economic structures of the contemporary capitalism, namely the contraction of social welfare systems, privatization of public utilities and institutions, and flexible working conditions and the job insecurity, precarity permeates the affective environment and the embodied experiences of labor and life²¹. It is simultaneously “an existential truth about contingencies of living, namely that there is no guarantees that the life one intends can or will be built”²².

The growing literature on precarity also relied on the recent social movements in Europe, especially Italy and France²³ where the activists mobilized the term in their struggles. This enabled the scholars not only to focus on the effects of the precarity on different social groups in terms of ‘existential damages’²⁴ but also take into account the new forms of struggles and solidarity, “potentials for new

²⁰ Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter, “From Precarity to Precariousness and Back Again: Labour, Life and Unstable Networks,” *Fibreculture*, no. 5 (2005), <http://five.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-022-from-precariety-to-precariousness-and-back-again-labour-life-and-unstable-networks/>; Vassilis Tsianos and Dimitris Papadopoulos, “Precarity: A Savage Journey to the Heart of Embodied Capitalism,” *Transversal*, October 2006, <http://eipcp.net/transversal/1106/tsianospapadopoulos/en>; Rosalind Gill and Andy Pratt, “In the Social Factory? Immaterial Labour, Precariousness and Cultural Work,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 25, no. 7–8 (2008), pp. 1–30; Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Franco “Bifo” Berardi, *Precarious Rhapsody: Semiocapitalism and the Pathologies of the Post-Alpha Generation* (London: Minor Compositions, 2009).

²¹ Tsianos and Papadopoulos, “Precarity: A Savage Journey to the Heart of Embodied Capitalism.”

²² Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 192.

²³ Movimenti dei Movimenti, “precarias de la Deriva” in Italy and intermittent cultural workers organizations in France are some of the activist groups which made use of the term. See also: Antonella Corsani and Maurizio Lazzarato, *Intermittents et Précaires* (Paris: Editions Amsterdam, 2008); Boppe De Sario, “Precari Su Marte”: An Experiment in Activism Against Precarity,” *Feminist Review*, no. 87 (2007), pp. 21–39; Michal Osterweil, “In Search of Movement: Italy’s ‘Movimento Dei Movimenti’, Theoretical-Practice and Remaking the Political” (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2010); Christopher Bodnar, “Taking It To The Streets: French Cultural Worker Resistance and the Creation of a Precariat Movement,” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 31, no. 3, pp.675–94.

²⁴ Noelle J. Molé, “Existential Damages: The Injury of Precarity Goes to Court,” *Cultural Anthropology* 28, no. 1 (2013), pp. 22–43.

subjectivities, new socialities and new kinds of politics”²⁵. One remark has to be made on the conceptualization of precarity in relation to the particular labor processes and mobilization that is discussed in this thesis. The precarious condition has been treated as cutting across classes and localities. There also emerged attempts to conceptualize a global class of precariat²⁶. However, many criticized the underlying Eurocentric premises of such attempts. As Laura Goldblatt states: “[t]hough the term as used today locates precarity as a general problem of the neoliberal economy, when mapped onto traditional identity categories, the invocation of these occupations code the paradigmatic precarious worker as implicitly and often explicitly white, male, educated, cis-gendered, straight, and located within the United States or western Europe”²⁷. The danger of the term is to make invisible many class, gender and race differences together with the implication of only providing a descriptive account of western male workers who are formally employed but have lost their privileged positions. Loic Wacquant’s use of the term for the ‘still-born groups’ of urban poor in a situation of advanced marginality could be seen an important contribution in this regard²⁸. Or Neilson and Rossiter’s emphasis that Fordism was an exception in the history of capitalism can lead us to be cautious about the use of the term²⁹. Similarly Lauren Berlant is critical of a clear cut definition of an encompassing new class given that “descriptions of the affected

²⁵ Gill and Pratt, “In the Social Factory? Immaterial Labour, Precariousness and Cultural Work.”, p. 3.

²⁶ Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011).

²⁷ Laura Goldblatt, “A Specter Is Haunting Precarity,” 23 April 2014, <http://www.full-stop.net/2014/04/23/blog/laura-goldblatt/a-specter-is-haunting-precarity/>. (accessed on 05 January 2014)

²⁸ Loic Wacquant, “Territorial Stigmatization in the Age of Advanced Marginality,” *Thesis Eleven*, no. 91 (2007), pp. 66–77.

²⁹ Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter, “Precarity as a Political Concept, Or, Fordism as Exception,” *Theory, Culture & Society*, no. 25 (2006), pp. 51–72.

populations veer wildly from workers in regimes of immaterial labor and the historical working class to the global managerial class; neobohemians who go to university, live off part-time or temporary jobs, and sometimes the dole while making art; and, well, everyone whose bodies and lives are saturated by capitalist forces and rhythms”³⁰. I follow Berlant’s conclusion that the prudent use of precarity in my context should refer to “how close the relatively privileged now are to living the affective life of those who have never been economically and institutionally secure”³¹. Their adaptation to a sense of precarity, which involves “a shift in the ordinary affective states”, also reveals that “the promise of the good life no longer masks the living precarity of this historical present” but rather it can only be narrated via the embracement of “precarity as the condition of being and belonging”³². In other words, my analysis in the following chapters will not be one of adapting the traditional working class literature to the situation of the recently mobilized lower level *white-collars* in Turkey. Neither will I try to dwell solely on the deterioration of working conditions of the global managerial class. My objective will be to focus on particular labor processes of these lower level *white-collars*, who mobilize by collectively reflecting on their labor process and challenge their political subjectivity to be taken for granted. In this regard, precarity is not equated to the job insecurity per se but rather will be defined through the effects of this insecure condition of life in and beyond the employment relations in corporations. Hence I approach to the question of precarity as constitutive for the subjective experiences of white-collar workers whose ordinary affective states has shifted to a new narrative of ‘normal

³⁰ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*. p. 192.

³¹ Ibid. p. 195.

³² Ibid., p. 194-6.

life' for middle classes: Not only secure employment is left outside the norms of the labor market but also precarious life condition as a sense of unpredictability, flexibility and adaptation to sudden changes becomes increasingly valuable norm in the 'good life' of middle classes. More specifically wage work and laboring in corporations for the university graduates reveals how the managerial discourse relying on the intimate relation between an individual's self and the labor she/he performs rests on the mechanisms which attempt to control the unstable, unpredictable sociality at work through management of the affective flows that are constitutive for workers' precarious 'good' life.

Accordingly, the theoretical framework of the thesis, that I lay down in detail in the next chapter, follows this insight about precarity, taking it as a constitutive affective component of the *white-collars'* work and life. Benefitting from Italian Autonomist literature on 'immaterial labor' and Eva Illouz's conceptualization of 'emotional capitalism' I focus on the control mechanisms of lower managerial workers' labor process and the construction of their subjectivities. Relying on Sarah Ahmed's conceptualization of 'affective economy', I focus on the affective economy of laboring in corporations. Lauren Berlant's and Melissa Gregg's uses of 'intimacy' enable me to deal with the intimate relation between an individual's self and the labor she/he performs. Lastly I benefitted from Lacanian psychoanalysis and its particular use in Critical Management literature in order to conceptualize political subjectivity of *white-collars* who are organized and attempt to establish a new space for relations of solidarity out of this affective economy of laboring

Field and Method

My research is based on an ethnography of a labor organization called *Plaza Eylem Platformu* (Plaza Action Platform – PEP). This platform was founded at the end

2008 when Plaza Actions (*Plaza Eylemleri*) had taken place in Maslak district, the Plaza Region (*Plazalar Bölgesi*) of Istanbul. Though I focus on the organization of the platform, as I elaborate on in the next chapter, I take the field of ‘white-collar mobilization’ more broadly than the platform. That means there exists similar labor organizations among *white-collars* such as IT employees, call center employees, psychologists, engineers and architects etc., who also try to get organized, sometimes come together to form an alliance against a particular issue and have conflictual but ongoing relations with unions. Although with Gezi Uprising in 2013, almost all of the organization attempts have been taking different forms, all these groups have accumulated important experiences which were also put into practice during the protests.

When I decided to study the Platform as an important figure in the organization of *white-collars* in Istanbul, I went to the European Social Forum in Istanbul, June 2010, and met some participants in the session on the recent mobilization of the white-collar workers. When I entered the room, the session had already started and a woman – whom I later understand that she was a professor in a university – was talking about the attitudes of the participants of the platform. She said that she was a member of the mail group for about a year and she observed the reactions in the virtual space to prepare a presentation on the platform. However, most of the platform members who were in the session did not know the academician who was talking about them. After the presentation, a severe discussion had taken place. Some members attacked the woman by arguing that she could not deduce from emails their organizational characteristics, neither the personal experiences of the members, which led them to organize. When the session finished, I was thinking that it was the worst occasion for me to meet the members of the platform and tell them that I was

going to make a research on the platform. When we met outside that noon and my friend who was also a member of the platform introduced me to the others, their first reaction was to warn me and say that if I would like to do a research on the platform, I should come to the meetings, talk to people rather than following the mail list. I learned that they had decided to allow people become member of the mail list after they attend three regular meetings. They asked me to send them my proposal. Then I started to attend their regular meetings and became also a member rather than a mere observer. As I elaborated in the last chapter, these prerequisites were not only a reactionary outcome of the presentation we attended but they were part of the workers' relations to their platform as an intimate space where they had to take into account every entry, exit, or any observation in relation to this space.

During all my involvement in the platform and all the research process, I was employed as a teaching assistant in one of the oldest *vakıf* universities in Turkey³³. My employment conditions and social relations in a 'corporate' university were also shaping my participation to the platform. In the first two years of my assistantship, I was formally employed for ten months although there is only one formal employment regime for assistantship in Turkey, which the secondary education law defines as 'research assistant' with a contract of a full year. Many assistants in *vakıf* universities are not counted as 'academic staff', which has several implications on the life of assistants from job insecurity to access to the social security. Overtime working and mobbing cases in an academia, in which corporate forms of social

³³ Vakıf University: Since education is still legally considered as public service in Turkey, *vakıf* universities, that are funded by private shareholders, rely on capital invested by big conglomerates without commercial purposes. However due to the weak supervision by the state agencies, the lack of transparency regarding their financial statements and corporate practices (such as performance criteria, mobbing, insecure contracts etc.) increasingly becoming widespread, it is hard to distinguish most of them from 'private' universities – which are expected to be found in the near future with the legal arrangement that has been discussed for several years.

organizing are increasingly being designed and practiced, enabled me to relate my everyday work relations to the experiences of *white-collars* that I encountered in the platform.

I regularly attended weekly meetings of the platform between March 2011 and June 2013. My data is mostly gathered during these meetings and in various activities of the platform where *white-collars* come together – like breakfast organizations, theatre or movie screenings. During my fieldwork, the platform has organized four ‘experience sharing workshops’ on anxiety, privacy, performance and job interviews; which also became important sources for my study. 25-35 workers attended to each of the workshops about the issues they decided beforehand. All the workshops were recorded, then transcribed and lastly the transcriptions were discussed by a bunch of workers who prepare a report to summarize the discussions. I took part in these processes and used these records in my thesis. I have also conducted ten in-depth interviews with the participants of the platform. Besides the regular meetings, workshops and interviews, I also observed how the encounters with other workers were realized early in the morning and in lunch breaks when we were distributing flyers and calling people to join to the platform. I also joined several actions with them; including Maydays, protests against Human Resources professionals’ conferences, solidarity meetings with other labor movements.

The white-collar workers studied in this thesis are from different companies, across a wide range of sectors like banking, insurance, research, information technologies, auditing and pharmaceutical marketing. Although there are many sector-specific issues that are involved in their jobs, they come together on the basis of commonalities between these different jobs. Due to my focus on the mobilization and organization around the platform, I did not look at the particular conditions in

different sectors or companies. A second drawback of this research can be the lack of a sociological analysis about the demographic indicators of the mobilized *white-collars*. Since my focus and the scope of this thesis did not allow me to do such a quantitative analysis, I will confine myself to state that most of the participants of the platform are university graduates who have ten or less years of experience of employment. 7 out of 10 workers that I interviewed were women; and in general the majority in the meetings were also women who sometimes organize their own meetings about harassment and mobbing issues.

Overview of Chapters

In the second chapter, I look at the employment relations and the management in companies for lower level managerial workers. After defining who the *white-collars* are and how they make use of this category; I layout the conceptual framework which allow me analyze in the following chapters their labor process, their self-organization and the relation between these two. This chapter, relying on the emerging literature on immaterial labor, affect and post-Fordism, argues that the managerial mechanisms in corporations and Human Resources Management apparatus in particular, attempt to capture affective investments of the workers in their labor through penetrating the intimate relation that workers establish with their work. The displacement of control onto the social relations at work in corporations rests on the mechanisms which attempt to control the unstable, unpredictable sociality at work through management of the affective economy of laboring.

The third chapter is about the particular managerial mechanisms through which workers experience the ‘intimate’ control over the social relations at work. In managerial knowledge, workers are represented as individual subjects and their ‘productivity’ is identified with the ‘scrutable facts’ of work. I focus on the

managerial techniques as mediations that intervene in the affective states of workers and become constitutive of their subjectivities. I deal with particular techniques that are discussed and challenged by the platform participants; namely job interviews, performance system, mobbing and firing. Accordingly, I analyze the production of knowledge about corporations by and among lower level managers, together with the managerial tools and mechanisms, which attempt to count, accumulate and/or manage affective economy of laboring in corporations.

The last chapter is about the formation of a new political subjectivity in and through the platform meetings. Here, I aim to trace the circulation of affects produced or modulated at work, through sharing of narratives of work among *white-collars*. The meetings and workshops of the platform are taken to be a new channel in the affective economy of laboring where workers publicize the hidden working conditions and share their intimate relations to laboring, mediated by the human resources techniques. I focus on how the tension of publicizing the privacy induced by the management mechanisms paves the way for the construction of the platform as a new ‘intimate’ space. Accordingly, subjective attachments of workers to the corporate functioning (and their potential reorientations) are analyzed from a Lacanian psychoanalytical standpoint in order to elaborate on the constitution of political subjectivities in the space of the platform.

CHAPTER II

MOBILIZATION OF WHITE-COLLARS AND PRECARIOUS LABOR REGIME IN TURKEY

Introduction

In December 2008, Istanbul's recently constructed plaza site Levent-Maslak district witnessed a workers' action for the first time. Workers from various companies in the plazas, together with the support of a few unions, started to hold meetings every Wednesday during lunch hours for 8 weeks. They called these demonstrations 'Plaza Actions',³⁴ which afterwards gave name to the platform studied in this thesis: *Plaza Eylem Platformu* (Plaza Action Platform). Plaza Actions were initially organized to protest the management of IBM Turkey, which had fired three of its workers due to their syndical activities. The union Tez Koop-İş was organized among the workers in IBM Turkey headquarters. When they applied for collective bargaining right (*Toplu İş Sözleşmesi*, TİS) to the company, the latter did not recognize the union as the representative of its workers, and sued the workers instead. In the meantime, three workers who were active in the unionization campaign were fired. Even though the three workers could not gain back their employment, these demonstrations signaled an important turning point in the mobilization of 'white-collars' in Istanbul. After

³⁴ More can be found at: Bilişim sektörü çalışanları kriz bahanesiyle işkolunda yaşanan işten çıkartmalara karşı 'Her Çarşamba Plaza Eylemlerine' hazırlanıyor (IT employees prepare to 'Plaza Actions Every Wednesday' against the layoffs in the sector realized under the pretext of crisis. http://www.sendika.org/yazi.php?yazi_no=20797. Güvenli Bir Gelecek, İş Güvencesi İstiyoruz, (We want a secure future, employment security) http://www.sendika.org/yazi.php?yazi_no=21127. (accessed on 21 June 2010)

two months of weekly meetings in front of *Yapı Kredi Plaza*, two labor organizations were formed by the workers, namely the IT Employees Solidarity Network (*Bilişim Çalışanları Dayanışma Ağı - BİÇDA*) and the Plaza Action Platform (*Plaza Eylem Platformu – PEP*). The phrase ‘white-collar workers’ was put in use by these organizations in several campaigns aiming to reveal the working conditions in the so-called prestigious, well-paid, and good jobs of twenty-first century Turkey.

The ways in which the signifier ‘white-collar’ is politicized among these workers leads one to consider not only the meaning they attach to it, but also the material conditions, connected to but extending beyond the workplace, and the formation of their subjectivities both at work and at the platform in their self-organization. In this chapter, firstly I overview how the term *white-collars* is put in circulation especially after the Plaza Actions, in order to show the ongoing struggle over the appropriation and the use of the word. Then, I lay out the conceptual framework through which I analyze the labor process and self-organization of the lower level managerial workers – who call themselves *white-collars* – throughout the following chapters. Relying on the conceptualization of immaterial labor, I will argue that the management technologies, which aim to control not only the ‘work’ performed by workers but also the very constitution of their subjectivities, permeate the intimate relation that every individual worker is supposed to establish with her/his labor. Hence what is attempted to be managed by the corporate machine is the affective economy of laboring, which can never be fully captured by capital.

Who Are The *White-Collars*?

After the protests at the end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009, and the formation of PEP and BİÇDA, the old term ‘the white-collar’ started to circulate in the pamphlets of the organized office workers and in various means of social media³⁵.

We call ourselves ‘white-collar’. The white-collar is university graduate, maybe knows foreign language, as labor power they use not their manual power but educated mental power to be employed. University graduates are included in this group. We don’t define white-collars with strict boundaries. Those who work as secretaries or in call centers can be included into this group. Or those who work as experts, engineers in big corporations can also be considered as white-collar.³⁶

As it can be seen from the above quotation, they define being ‘white-collar’ very loosely, as performing ‘mental labor’ and being employed in a corporation. When I started to attend the meetings of the platform, I realized that the composition of the platform included many workers from banking and insurance, research, audit companies and many sector-independent workers like accountants, software developers or graphic designers. Although an explicit decision was not taken, the directors (or executives, managers) – who are mostly called as ‘bosses’ – were not included in this definition of *white-collars*.

We have friends from research, insurance, graphics or other professions. We don’t focus on particular profession. But some problems of the work life in general are the common concern for this group. These are working overtime,

³⁵ Pamphlets of the platform can be found at: www.plazaeylem.org Also two examples of the related newspaper articles: Ece Temelkuran, Beyaz yakalı ‘hatırlıyor’: Erken örgütlenme hayatı kurtarır!, 03 December 2008, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/Yazar.aspx?aType=YazarDetay&ArticleID=1023871&AuthorID=60&Date=03.12.2008>. (accessed on 06 December 2008). And Eser Sandıkçı, Beyaz yakalı işçiler hareketleniyor, 01 April 2010, http://toplumsalozgurluk.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=355&Itemid=78. (accessed on 04 April 2010).

³⁶ Öztürk, “Biz Beyazyakalılar, Eyleme Hazırız! (We the White-Collars, Ready to Act!).” *Biz kendimize ‘beyaz yakalı’ diyoruz. Beyaz yakalı üniversite mezunu, belki yabancı dil bilen, iş gücü olarak, kol gücünü değil, eğitilmiş zihinsel gücünü kullanarak çalışanlardır. Üniversite mezunları bu guruba giriyorlar. Beyazyakalıları net sınırlarla tanımlamıyoruz. Bu gurubun içinde yer alanlar bir yerde sekreterlik yapan ya da çağrı merkezinde çalışanlar da olabilir. Ya da büyük bir şirkette uzman, mühendis olarak çalışanlar da beyazyakalı sayılırlar.*

performance system, working with a feeling of constant control, psychological intimidation, leading employees towards competition among themselves, seeming polite to each other on the surface but implicitly make enemies, career lies... we aimed a network of solidarity among people who feel oneself lonely under all these circumstances.³⁷

Besides the traditional leftist accounts emphasizing the importance of unions among office workers for securing traditional working class demands on wage levels or working hours, *white-collars*' own writings focused more on the emotional or psychological aspects of their working conditions in the offices. They challenged the attributed image of themselves as the managers of the big private companies, elegantly dressed professionals who enjoy their jobs. Rather, these *white-collars* emphasized the underside of corporations, which is not visible to the outside, and even is not articulated openly in the workplaces.

One white-collar, be it men or woman, must take care of what she/he wears, be 'presentable' and finish the given job under flexible conditions. That is, what blue-collar calls 'overtime' and receive extra payment is an ordinary and unpaid work for white-collar. ... When a white-collar starts to a job, she/he sees her/his bosses, directors as the ones who will take her/him up in her/his career. But after several experiences, eventually, it turns out not to be the case. Then by saying "From now on, I will play the game according to its rules!", capitalist rules of work life, combined with ambition, come into play. This brings you to a point where you become someone completely unconcerned with the emotions you had after graduation or expectations you had when get a job. You act like someone you are not, you 'professional'ize. You remember the story of big fish-small fish, and you learn to kill in order not to be killed. This is such a ground. In fact, huge images of the fancy buildings, shopping malls, plazas are all hiding the barbarism of work relations. As the years pass, you understand better how your working conditions get heavier.³⁸

³⁷ Ibid. *Aramızda araştırmacı, sigortacı, grafiker ve başka mesleklerden arkadaşlarımız var. Belli bir mesleğe yönelik çalışma yapmıyoruz. Ancak çalışma hayatının kimi sorunları bu gurubun ortak derdi. Bunlar fazla mesai, performans sistemi, sürekli kontrol hissi ile çalışma, psikolojik yıldırma, çalışanların birbirine rekabet etmeye yöneltilmesi, görünüşte birbirine karşı kibar görünen ama alttan alta düşman edilen, kariyer yalanı ile bütün bu koşullarda kendini yalnız hisseden insanlar arasında bir dayanışma ağı hedefledik.*

³⁸ Ibid.

Bir beyaz yakalı, erkek ya da kadın olsun kıyafetine özen göstermek, 'prezentabl' olmak ve verilen işi esnek koşullarda yerine getirmek zorundadır. Yani, mavi yakalının 'fazla mesai' dediği ve ücretini

Hence, the use of *white-collars* by the organization referred to the workers' shared experiences of managerial mechanisms that targeted competitive workers' 'personal' emotions and expectations from work. For example, in the gathering that was organized on 14 April 2012 by *PEP*, in cooperation with *BİÇDA*, *ÇMÇ* (Call Center Employees) and *TODAP* (Psychologists for Social Solidarity), under the name of "White-collars Discuss" (*Beyazyakalılar Konuşuyor*), each organization presented their activities, organization strategies and obstacles they face. In this meeting, an important emphasis by *PEP* was on competitive collegial relations experienced as the corrosion of thrust and loneliness in coping with managerial mechanisms in the workplace.

Emphasizing the micro-management of social relations at work as the defining feature of *white-collars* has also been associated with 'professionalism' and 'plaza'. Trying to struggle against their outside image as privileged managers in well-off companies, *PEP* members distance themselves from 'professionalism,' which they often see as a source of oppression. On the other hand, the word 'plaza', which refers to the recently constructed high-tech buildings for offices, signifies the particularity of their material working environment and its difference from other workers. In 2011, a well known internet based humor website Zaytung (www.zaytung.com) started publishing a review called *beyaz yaka* (white collar), in which the everyday working life in offices was used as the main source of jokes.

aldığı çalışma, beyaz yakalı için olağan ve ücretsiz yapılan işi tarif ediyor. ... Beyaz yakalı işe başladığında, ilk yıllarda patronlarını, yöneticilerini kendisini yukarıya taşıyacak kişiler gibi görüyor. Fakat zamanla, yaşanan deneyimlerle bunun böyle olmadığı ortaya çıkıyor. 'Bundan sonra oyunu kuralına göre oynayacağım' denerek capitalist rekabet kuralları hırsıyla birleştirilip devreye giriyor. Bu sizi mezun olduğunuz zamanki duygularınızla ya da işe başladığınız zamanki beklentilerinizle hiç ilgisi olmayan biri haline getiriyor. Olmadığınız bir insan gibi davranıyorsunuz. 'profesyonel' leşiyorsunuz. 'Büyük balık küçük balık' hikayesini hatırlıyorsunuz ve ölmek için öldürmeyi öğreniyorsunuz. Burası böyle bir zemin. Aslında görkemli binaların dev görüntüleri, alışveriş merkezleri, plazalar çalışma ilişkilerinin barbarlığını gizliyor. Nitekim çalışma koşullarınızın giderek daha da ağırlaştığını, yıllar geçtikçe daha iyi anlıyorsunuz.

After a while this white-collar e-magazine became sponsored by Turkcell, the biggest GSM operator in Turkey, which turned it into a monthly review published on the website of its ‘club of professionals’. This agreement between the site and the company does not only show how the tag ‘white-collar’ and ‘professional’ is made interchangeable by a corporate move but also, and more importantly, it gives clues about the struggle within the so-called *white-collars* which also appears in the usage of the term.

Meanwhile, there were emerging number of websites or forums where the language used in the offices, mostly by the directors but also lower level managerial employees are made fun of. ‘Plaza language and literature’ was the common name given to the use of the English keywords such as proactive, meeting, action, cool etc. for business communication³⁹. In PEP meetings, workers expressed how they were disturbed by such usages and tried avoiding such phrases during the meetings so that they could distance themselves from what they call ‘white-collar culture’ or ‘plaza culture’ in which they find themselves to be its everyday perpetrators.

The loose and ambiguous definitions of *white-collars* or *plaza employees*, and the tension between labor organizations’ self-definitions and the corporate uses of the term reveal a struggle over the terms themselves. After the Gezi Uprising, two different organizations that were formed by *white-collars* have been crystallizing the very same struggle: *Beyazyakalı Dayanışması* (White-Collar Solidarity) and

³⁹ examples like ‘*lead etmek*’, ‘*aksiyon almak*’, ‘*-yor olacağım*’, ‘*set etmek*’ can be found under the heading of ‘plaza dili ve edebiyatı’ (plaza language and literature): <https://eksisozluk.com/plaza-dili-ve-edebiyati--3614558> (accessed on 10 June 2012); <http://listelist.com/beyaz-yaka-dili-ve-plaza-edebiyati/> (accessed on 10 June 2012); <http://www.uludagsozluk.com/k/plaza-dili-ve-edebiyat%C4%B1/> (accessed on 10 June 2012); http://hrkronikleri.blogspot.com.tr/2012/12/plaza-dili-ve-edebiyat_27.html (accessed on 10 June 2012); <http://onedio.com/haber/12-adimla-plaza-turkcesine-giris-182744> (accessed on 10 June 2012).

Beyazyakalılar Bişey Yapsın (White-Collars Do Something). While the former group includes the old organizations like PEP, BİÇDA, and ÇMÇ as well as other individual employees who participated in the protests, and aims to develop relations of solidarity among white-collar workers through the sharing of the gains won and problems encountered in different workplaces; the second organization uses the term *white-collars* in the context of philanthropic activities (such as supporting local shopkeepers (*esnaf*) or helping disabled citizens in the urban life), and defines *white-collars* as the ones who can realize the projects they believe in⁴⁰.

Throughout writing this thesis, I had a great difficulty using this old and loaded term ‘the white-collar’ since it encompasses a wide variety of salaried employees from secretaries to middle level managers, and reproduces the old binary of manual and mental labor. Furthermore, the phrase does not refer to one specific group of people who could be a subject matter of a research. However, I believe that it is important to keep the category of ‘white-collars’ through which a particular group of workers define themselves and make claims in order to distinguish themselves from both upper level managers (executives or directors) and factory workers. Meanwhile, given my epistemological difficulty to conduct a research about such a loosely defined group and culture; I avoid making generalizations about a whole range of office workers and make claims about a particular segment of salaried employees in private corporations in Istanbul. The term *white-collars* used in this thesis refers to the lower level managerial employees employed in different companies (ranging from director assistantship or secretaries to credit experts or accountants; from operational and repetitive jobs, to project based employed trainers

⁴⁰ More information about these groups and their activities can be found at the following websites: <https://beyazyakalidayanismasi.wordpress.com> and <https://www.beyazyakalilarbiseyyapsa.com>

or IT specialists). Plaza Action Platform is the particular site through which I aim to analyze the organization of the *white-collars* and the formation of their political subjectivities.

Conceptualizing White Collar Labor and Subjectivity

As I quoted above, *Plaza Eylem Platformu* and organized *white-collars* often use the term for the educated employees working in plazas. Although ‘mental’ labor is an important point of reference they mention in the interviews, the platform participants primarily define themselves through the working conditions that involve managerial mechanisms targeting both ‘personal’ characteristics of each individual worker and their communication throughout labor processes. Before focusing on how to conceptualize this management and control, I will first offer a theoretical framework on how to handle the heterogeneous practices of white-collar labor.

The binary of blue collar and white collar has usually been taken for granted in the study of capitalism and working class, although this collar line binary relies on a nexus of many interdependent binaries as stated by Jacqueline Southern:

goods/services, productive/unproductive labor, manual/mental labor, unskilled/skilled, production/administration, subordination/authority, wages/status, production/consumption, strength/weakness, male/female, working class/other (usually middle or new middle class, often neoproletariat), and not least, class consciousness/self-estrangement⁴¹

The relationship between material work and non-material commodity production has always been an important discussion point for the Marxian labor theory of value.

White-collars as the generic category for the unproductive office work have always been at the center of this old and ongoing debate about the relationship between

⁴¹ Jacqueline Southern, “Blue Collar, White Collar: Deconstructing Classification,” in *Class and Its Others*, ed. J. K. Gibson-Graham, Stephen A. Resnick, and Richard D. Wolff (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 200.

consciousness and the labor that produces or does not produce surplus value. The classical study of C. Wright Mills, *The White Collar* pointed to how the negative definition of these laborers as ‘non-commodity producing’ makes the group a very heterogeneous one across a wide range of jobs⁴². Mills uses the term ‘middle class’ to subsume this segment of laborers into a heterogeneous and unclear category. Middle class or the new middle class and ‘petty bourgeoisie’ were used to define this intermediary group in terms of non-ownership of the means of production and their unproductive labor throughout the 20th century in Marxist analyses. All these groups were assigned transitory or contradictory class positions between proletariat and bourgeoisie by Marxist social theory.⁴³ Southern focuses on the effects of the

⁴² C. Wright Mills, *White Collar. The American Middle Classes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969).

⁴³ An important line of discussion on white collars is based on the Marx’s distinction between productive and unproductive labor. Many Marxist theoreticians categorize them as unproductive since they don’t produce commodity, surplus value and are paid from the already appropriated surplus. This analytical distinction had also important implications for the definition of working class. Poulantzas for instance claimed that the distinction between the productive and unproductive labor determines the boundary of the working class. He conceptualized white-collars who don’t produce surplus value as the ‘new petty bourgeoisie’ rather than part of the working class and categorized it as transitory group. Similarly Sweezy argued that they should be defined as ‘new middle class’ due to the objective relation they have with the ruling class in terms of earnings. Though many others also accept the distinction, they don’t take it as crucial for the definition of the working class. Braverman emphasized the deskilling of the ‘qualified labour’ in office and proletarianization of white-collars. He stated that the analytical distinction had lost its ‘social force’ and defined unproductive labor as ‘commercial proletariat’. Erik Olin Wright also emphasizes the complexity of class positions that the term ‘white-collars’ makes invisible. He chooses to analytically differentiate class positions among what he calls ‘professional-managerial class’ with respect to the property relations to the means of production in terms of economic ownership and the relations of possession which involve control of means of production and control of labour power. His analysis highlights the ‘contradictory class locations’ among the intermediate strata between proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie and provides a map in terms of contradictions inherent in the positions workers are assigned in company hierarchy. Another account can be found in Steve Resnick and Richard Wolff who kept the analytical distinction but argued that it serves to recognize class differences within the working class. They stated that the unproductive laborers occupy ‘subsumed class positions’. Lastly, for the sake of the analysis of this thesis, this analytical distinction is excluded because of two reasons: first I agree that the ‘social force’ of this distinction is not valid for the existing labor movement in Turkey, and second the heterogeneous group of white-collars requires a detailed map in terms of forms of labor performed in order to be categorized according to whether they participate or not in the production of surplus value. Erik Olin Wright, “Class Boundaries in Advanced Capitalist Societies,” *New Left Review*, no. 98 (1976), pp. 3–41; Henri Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (Monthly Review Press, 1998); Stephen A. Resnick and Richard D. Wolff, *Knowledge and Class: A Marxian Critique of Political Economy* (University of Chicago Press, 1989).

definitions given to this group. She argues that the figure of the white-collar depicted mostly through different occupations in office environment “leaves remarkably few moves for workers or others to make, no new or transformative subject positions for them to create and fill.”⁴⁴ They are mostly taken as representing the development of the system of monopoly or advanced capitalism and described as “unproductive, selfish, privileged, close to management, confused about their real interests, less than real workers”, which implies at best a “tutelary relationship” between the left and white-collars workers.⁴⁵ Since this thesis relies on a research on *white-collars* who organize around a platform in Istanbul, first of all it challenges the assumptions that are taken for granted about the political subjectivity of the white-collar, or the new middle class. In order to reveal and analyze the mechanisms through which the political subjectivity of these workers is formed, I will focus on the relationship between their material labor practices and their self-organization.

Recently, the terms like post-industrial society, liquid modernity, post-Fordism, information society, or ‘new capitalism’ were coined by different theorists, who emphasized the changing nature of labor processes and of capital accumulation from 1960s and 70s onwards. The Italian Autonomist Marxist theoreticians relying on the primacy of the needs and desires of the living labor in the history of transformation of the capitalist mode of production, argue that the change in the labor regime after 1960s and 70s was fueled by the resistance of workers in and beyond factory. Focusing on Italian experience in 70s, Antonio Negri argues that the exploitation extends outside of the factory floor to everyday life, and calls the new

⁴⁴ Southern, “Blue Collar, White Collar.”, p. 222.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 220.

figure of worker as ‘social worker’. According to him, the shift from ‘mass worker’ to social worker was about the redefinition of labor power as ‘social labour power’⁴⁶. Later in *Empire*, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, relying on Michel Foucault’s emphasis on how life itself becomes the object of power in modern society, argue that the production itself became ‘biopolitical’ in post-Fordism⁴⁷. They coin the term ‘biopolitical labour’ as the “labour that creates not only material goods but also relationships and ultimately social life itself”⁴⁸. They argue that the historical transformation of capitalism after the crisis of Fordism reveals not only a reorganization of production to increase productivity and surplus value but also a transformation of the production itself. According to them, ‘immaterial labour’, defined as “labour that is primarily intellectual or linguistic” which “produces ideas, symbols, quotes, texts, linguistic figures, images, and other such products” and “affective labour ... that produces or manipulates affects such as a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, or passion”⁴⁹ becomes hegemonic in contemporary capitalism. This conceptualization of ‘immaterial labor’ suggests us to take into account the transformation of the very nature of production of surplus value in contemporary capitalism⁵⁰.

⁴⁶ Toni Negri, *Revolution Retrieved. Writings on Marx, Keynes, Capitalist Crisis and New Social Subjects (1967-83)* (London: Red Notes, 1988).

⁴⁷ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 29.

⁴⁸ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004). p. 109.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.108.

⁵⁰ Italian Autonomist Marxist literature, also referred as Operaismo movement, offers a political analysis that emerged out of the transformations in Italy during the last century, namely passage from a largely agricultural form of capitalism to a post-Fordist, informational society. Intellectuals such as Maurizio Lazzarato, Paolo Virno, Franco Berardi, Mario Tronti and Antonio Negri have been writing on post-Fordism and the transformation of capitalist production since late 1960s and 1970s. Hence besides Hardt and Negri’s well-known trilogy published in 2000s, the fundamentals of the analysis was laid down by these key theorists in various occasions, including journals such as *Futur Anterieur* and *Multitudes* in France, but also *Luogo Comune*, *Metropoli*, and *DeriveApprodi* in Italy. The conceptualization of ‘immaterial labor’, though not used by all these figures, emerged from a

Literature on the prominence of immaterial labor after 1960s and 70s emphasizes how social relations become both the object and the subject of production in contemporary capitalism. Communication as “the very capacity to be social” in Maurizio Lazarato’s words⁵¹; “desires, affects and life itself” in Hardt and Negri’s words⁵² are put into production rather than located at the site of reproduction or organization of production. According to them, this is also a fundamental aspect of the transition from formal to real subsumption, in the sense that the fixed capital can no more be evaluated as only machines (dead labor) but human subjectivity also becomes fixed capital in the latter phase: “It is a model of labour in which the effect on social relations, on subjectivity, is not a byproduct of a more primary transformation of things as in the schema of the labor process but is directly produced by labor itself”⁵³. Hence, “capital no longer simply subjects a preexisting social and technical order of production to the formal conditions of wage and commodity production but rather creates its own technological and social

combination of feminist-autonomist theories of unwaged domestic labor, autonomist discussions of “social factory” and “social worker”, and French poststructuralist theories of subjectivity which was encountered when some key theorists fled to France in order to avoid arrest. While differing from each other in some respects, it can be said that Autonomist Marxists are nonetheless united by a core set of theses regarding the transformation of production in the age they call post-Fordism. See also Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Giovanna F. Dalla Costa, eds., *Women, Development, and Labor of Reproduction: Struggles and Movements* (Trenton and Asmara: Africa World Press, 1999); Nick Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Marx: Cycles and Circuits in High-Technology Capitalism* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Leopoldina Fortunati, *The Arcane of Reproduction: Housework, Prostitution, Labor and Capital* (New York: Autonomedia, 1995); Negri, *Revolution Retrieved. Writings on Marx, Keynes, Capitalist Crisis and New Social Subjects (1967-83)*. Enda Brophy, “The Organizations of Immaterial Labour: Knowledge Worker Resistance In Post-Fordism” (Queen’s University, 2008).

⁵¹ Maurizio Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor,” in *Radical Thought in Italy*, ed. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 133–47.

⁵² Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*. See also Antonio Negri, “Value and Affect,” *Boundary 2* 26, no. 2 (1999), pp. 77–88. and Michael Hardt, “Affective Labor,” *Boundary 2* 26, no. 2 (1999), pp. 89–100.

⁵³ Jason Read, *The Micro-Politics of Capital : Marx and the Prehistory of the Present* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), p. 125.

conditions”⁵⁴. Relying on Marx’s conceptualization of the tendency of capitalism to real subsumption, Jason Read states that the social relations become both the object and the subject of production in real subsumption; accumulation of capital takes place with “an accumulation of the very capacity to be social or to interact – a capacity that exists prior to and outside of capital”⁵⁵.

Immaterial Labor and Management

This theoretical framework enables us to consider the work performed by *white-collars* in terms of immaterial labor since the control mechanisms in labor process target not only the technical commands workers are subjected to but they also involve intricate ways in which capital is put into the production of workers’ subjectivities. Facilities provided by the corporation – such as discounted holiday packages or hobby courses, use of mobile phones etc. – target “leisure time” of workers whose life “outside workplace” must also be governed and put into production. This invasion of life by capital means increasing productivity for the corporation through the exploitation of workers’ desires and affects beyond work – that cannot anymore be confined to workplace. Paolo Virno states that “labour becomes an excessive social liability” in an age of workers who “have to behave as their own employers”⁵⁶. Flexible working hours, as stated in almost all job announcements, requires workers to accept unremunerated overwork under the guise of personal responsibility to finish a project or one’s commitment to perform a job. In addition to overworking at the workplace, various information and communication

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 18.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 128.

⁵⁶ Paolo Virno, “On the Parasitic Character of Wage Labor,” *SubStance* 36, no. 1 (2007), p. 38.

technologies also enable workers to work outside workplace in ever more flexible ways. In other words, the demands from workers have been intensified through making the workers “entrepreneurs of themselves”. The “neo-individualism at work in post-Fordism” according to Virno, consists of “know-how inseparable from the individual person; encompasses certain character traits”⁵⁷. Lazzarato states that “management takes workers’ subjectivity into consideration only in order to codify it in line with the requirements of production”⁵⁸. Recent management techniques, which I analyze in the following chapter, reveal how the character traits of an individual worker constitute the very criteria of particular jobs. This ‘subjective property’ becomes part of the production process, instead of being its chief actor – as it was considered to be the case in industrial production of commodities.

Two remarks have to be made at this point, however. First, it is important to note that Lazzarato, Negri and Hardt use immaterial labor as the generalized form of labor-power rather than being limited to a particular group of workers. This encompassing definition refers both to the ‘immaterial halo’ of every material commodity in the market in terms of the information and communication technologies of design, marketing and advertisement, and to the affective labor, which relies on the production and circulation of “states of being, feelings of well-being, desire, ease, and passion”⁵⁹. The feminist literature on unpaid domestic labor or care work forms the basis for the theoretical elaboration on how capital subsumes human potentialities which it does not necessarily create. What is regarded as ‘unproductive’ labor following the classical Marxist framework and confined to

⁵⁷ Paolo Virno, “Post-Fordist Semblance,” *SubStance* 36, no. 1 (2007), p. 44.

⁵⁸ Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor.”, p.136.

⁵⁹ Read, p. 127-8.

‘private space’ as reproductive labor was challenged by feminist scholars who argued that capitalism relied on this reproduction that constituted the conditions of possibility of the surplus value production⁶⁰. Hence the reproduction of the living labor as taking place outside capitalism in formal subsumption, appeared as a ‘natural force of social labor’ – i.e. housework, childcare, sexual reproduction were seen as nonwork and this enabled capital to define wage labor as value producing work.⁶¹ Conceptualized as the production of value beyond the economic value appropriated through waged labor and commodity production, domestic labor has been seen as a form alien to capital, “with its own distinct rules, traditions and cultures”⁶². What is identified as a recent change in the production and capitalist appropriation of value, according to Hardt and Negri, is the fact that value production-time and life-time increasingly overlap. They state that labor time ceases to be the possible measurement of value since that value production is displaced onto affect in post-Fordism. In other words, what is used to be called ‘reproduction’ becomes coextensive with production; real subsumption blurs the very distinction since all of social life is being absorbed within the capitalist production.⁶³ David Staples, following Patricia Clough, Luciana Parisi and Tiziana Terranova, draws attention to the technoscientific apparatus and its transformation in order to

⁶⁰ Here, I refer to the Domestic Labor Debate by particular feminists critiques of Marxist labor value conceptualizations. See Maxine Molyneux, “Beyond the Domestic Labor Debate,” *New Left Review* 1, no. 116 (1979). Leopoldina Fortunati, *The Arcane of Reproduction: Housework, Prostitution, Labor and Capital* (New York: Autonomedia, 1995). Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Brooklyn/Oakland: PM Press/Common Notions, 2012). Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*.

⁶¹ David Staples, “Women’s Work and the Ambivalent Gift of Entropy,” in *The Affective Turn. Theorizing the Social*, ed. Patricia Ticineto Clough (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), pp. 119–50.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁶³ Negri, “Value and Affect.”, p. 83.

understand this shift which is not simply a shift from manufacturing to service as the hegemonic forms. Rather, what appears like the decline of industrial labor is the transformation of value extracting technologies in the sense that the ‘reproduction’, or life itself is no longer outside capitalist value production (which constantly attempts to discipline through enclosures like family or corporation) but as a productive ground to be controlled by various mechanisms (through which capital has attempted to internalize the subjectivity of living labor in all sites of sociality)⁶⁴.

The second remark is about the development of management mechanisms in corporations and its relation to this conceptualization of immaterial labor. The emergence of a global managerial knowledge, which provide the context for the analysis in this thesis, reveals the technological apparatus through which capital attempts to internalize labor in its sociality – not only outside the realm of commodity production per se but also in the very institution of corporations. In this regard, the management of emotional life in the ‘bureaucratic’ institutions should be under scrutiny in order to follow how capital attempts to appropriate the constitutive force of emotions as productive states. Eva Illouz argues that the rise of ‘management’ as a new science and the incorporation of psychology in the search of solutions for the problems of discipline and productivity in corporations at the beginning of twentieth century became an important component of the making of emotional capitalism. She focuses on El Mayo’s experiments at General Electric in

⁶⁴ Parisi and Terranova argues that the historical transformation from industrial to the contemporary financial capitalism should be understood parallel to the shift in the history of science from thermodynamics to the complexity theory. Heat-Death, as the final triumph of entropy according to the second law of thermodynamics, was also a tendency of industrial capitalism which could not make use of the entropic labor it produced in a closed system. In contemporary technoscientific capitalism, where the shift from thermodynamic from turbulent body, from discipline to control takes place, the turbulent flows of labor became valuable for capital rather than being entropic in the ontological limits of thermodynamics. Luciana Parisi and Tiziana Terranova, “Heat-Death: Emergence and Control in Genetic Engineering and Artificial Life,” *CTheory* www.ctheory.com/article/a84.html.

1920s to show how “paying attention to emotions, controlling anger, listening sympathetically to others” became founding parts of the new management theory which claimed to end the impersonal bureaucratized conceptions of the corporate functioning:

The language of psychology was enormously successful in shaping the discourse of corporate selfhood because it was able to make sense of the transformations of the capitalist workplace and because it naturalized new forms of competition and hierarchies, all of which were extrinsic to the psychological persuasion per se but which were increasingly codified by it⁶⁵.

Given the transformations of the workplaces in the course of twentieth century, especially the increasing employment in large corporations, a new sub-discipline of ‘organizational/industrial psychology’ started to become prominent in corporations. By focusing on the ‘human element’ in corporate functioning, the emphasis shifted towards cooperation among co-workers and being a successful manager began to be defined by the capacity to manage oneself and manage others through being able to evaluate oneself ‘objectively’ – a therapeutic discourse which pushes the manager to “engage in a work of introspection” in order to improve his communication skills. According to Illouz, this involvement of psychology is translated into “a technology of self-management relying extensively on language and on the proper management of emotions but with the aim of engineering inter- and intra-emotional coordination”⁶⁶. This technology constituted the ‘imperative of communication’ according to her; and the most important quality of a good manager consists of a person’s ‘emotional competence’ to manage social relations, communication at the workplace. Hence the mechanisms of control in corporations, mainly the Human Resources Management techniques, which reveal a displacement of control onto

⁶⁵ Eva Illouz, *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism* (London: Polity Press, 2009), p.16.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 19.

social relations, more specifically onto the communication among workers, should not be confused with the transformation of the capitalist production but seen as an important historical component which paves the way for the incorporation of subjectivity into capitalist production.

These two lines of theoretical work, first on the transformed relationship between production, reproduction and value in post-fordism, and second on the historical development of management as a science that codifies and attempts to control emotions of managers since the beginning of the last century, give a twist to the use of immaterial labor in this thesis: On the one hand, what is called the transformation of the production is simultaneously the transformation of reproduction, which becomes a productive ground for capital rather than being left outside of value production. Thus, the value extracting technologies target the very production of worker subjectivities in the sociality at work. On the other hand, the rise of management as science shows clearly that emotions have always been part of the functioning of corporate mechanisms. Hence the study of the mechanisms of control over social relations in corporations, in the context of precarious labor market, has to refer to the history of managerial knowledge and practices, which cannot be simply associated with post-Fordism. Following these remarks, I continue with how to take into account not only the management of the workers' emotions but also treating emotions as the constitutive force and the ways in which this emotional management becomes simultaneously 'intimate' and 'corporate' through managerial devices.

Intimacy and Labor

Eva Illouz's emphasis on the 'making of emotional capitalism' highlights a dynamics through which economic relations become increasingly emotional and intimate relationships, and simultaneously emotional and intimate relationships become

increasingly subjected to economic cost-benefit calculation models. According to Illouz, the function of the particular sub-disciplines of psychology in the management at workplace is an important indicative of how labor processes are increasingly treated as personal experiences that need to be managed emotionally by managers. She argues – I will also try to demonstrate this in the following chapters – that managers’ “emotional competence” is an important work requirement according to managerial apparatus in corporations.

The question of intimacy was already discussed by two important figures whose contributions are crucial for the conceptualization of affective economy of laboring in corporations throughout this thesis. C. Wright Mills in *White Collar* elaborated on the issue of subjectivity in terms of ‘alienation’. He emphasized that the ‘personality market’ carried “self and social alienation to explicit extremes”⁶⁷. The split of work and life animated his approach that tend to presuppose a site of ‘unalienated labor’, where workers’ intimate selves are not required to be commodified and sold in the labor market. To put it more clearly, Mills argues that work requires not much of one’s self; he stresses that commodification and marketization merely alienates parts of one’s self, while leaving out the ‘real’ or ‘intimate’ self outside work (and consequently, outside Mill’s analysis). Later, Arlie Hochschild who coined the term ‘emotional labor’ in her analysis of flight attendants’ labor processes, emphasized how the corporate management of feelings demand too much of the self⁶⁸. Her analysis of emotional labor deals with the ways in which ‘private management of feeling’ by individuals becomes subjected to the corporate management technologies

⁶⁷ C. Wright Mills, *White Collar*, p. 225.

⁶⁸ Arlie Russell Horchschild, *Managed Heart. Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

and put into ‘commercial use’. She looks at how capital attempts to manage the supposedly ‘private realm of feeling’. Although she acknowledges that this private realm does not refer to a purely personal and authentic space free of wider social relationships, her analysis nonetheless relies on a ‘private’ world of emotions and feelings, an ‘intimate’ self that is taken to be distinct from capitalist labor relations. To put it differently using Kathi Weeks’ words, *Managed Heart* is only visible by an ideal of the ‘unmanaged heart’⁶⁹. The reason why I rely on these two diverging, almost opposed accounts on the relation between management and intimate self, is the fact that they both offer analyses which assume a coherent private self (or private management of feelings) that is either intentionally left outside the sphere of management or encroached by the management. My question is not whether this ideal private self exists or not; I do not seek to look for the commercialization of feelings which were used to be private. Rather I am interested in how the very distinction of these realms, the boundaries between work and nonwork, public and private, impersonal and personal are not pre-given, but are drawn by concrete struggles. In fact, Hochschild herself gives important clues about the performative effects of this struggle when she theorizes ‘deep acts’ of the workers whose way of managing their emotions and displaying them at work permeates their life outside work. But again her usage of ‘deep acts’ as opposed to ‘surface acts’ or ‘true self’ as opposed to ‘false self’⁷⁰ again presumes an intimate, private space of ‘feeling management’. My analysis of *white-collars* in Istanbul reveals the very struggle over this presumed intimacy, which cannot be treated simply as a struggle between a pre-

⁶⁹ Kathi Weeks, “Life Within and Against Work: Affective Labor, Feminist Critique, and Post-Fordist Politics,” *Ephemera* 7, no. 1 (2007), p. 244.

⁷⁰ Hochschild, *Managed Heart. Commercialization of Human Feeling*. See especially “Chapter 9: The Search for Authenticity” and “Appendix A. Models of Emotions: From Darwin to Goffman” and “Appendix B. Naming Feeling”

established intimate self of the worker and the management of it toward commercial uses. As I will explain below, the conceptualization of intimacy in the context of the affective economy of laboring leads to an analysis of the corporate mechanisms that mediate workers' intimate relation to their labor, the affective effects that blur the boundary between life and work or between the personal and the impersonal, and also the organization of workers for solidarity that challenges both the corporate machine and the corresponding understanding of intimacy as a private, inner self of workers to be put into production.

Before elaborating on how this 'intimacy' will be conceptualized, an important distinction has to be made at this point about the use of affect instead of emotion or feeling, which can be found in Hochschild's analysis and many others after her. Though my usage of the word is heavily influenced and informed by the recent literature on affect⁷¹, two crucial emphases led me to approach white-collar labor in terms of its affective dimensions. Firstly, the conventional use of feeling and emotions imply naming what one has, they signify a relation of property, coming from the inner self, rather than a movement involving subjects and objects.

it is the failure of emotions to be located in a body, object, or figures that allows emotions to (re)produce or generate the effects that they do.⁷²

Following Sara Ahmed who defined 'affective economy' for an analysis of how emotions work, move between bodies, create the very effect of boundaries, I will use

⁷¹ B. Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Post-Contemporary Interventions Latin America in Translation En Traducción Em Tradução Series (Duke University Press, 2002); J. Protevi, *Political Affect: Connecting the Social and the Somatic*, Posthumanities Series (University of Minnesota Press, 2009); P.T. Clough and J. Halley, *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (Duke University Press, 2007); M. Gregg and G.J. Seigworth, *The Affect Theory Reader* (Duke University Press, 2010).

⁷² Sara Ahmed, "Affective Economies," *Social Text* 22, no. 2 (2004), p. 124.

‘the affective economy of laboring’ in order to take into account the constitutive force of affect in sustaining and disrupting the corporate functioning of relations. Related to the critique I mentioned above about Hochschild and Mills’ approach to the relation between work and the self, the concept of affect enables me to look for how laboring itself blurs the very boundary between life and work. Secondly, when the platform meetings led me to focus on the managerial techniques in corporations, I realized that these techniques, be it various tools, devices or particular encounters, are attempts to control an ambiguous affective economy of laboring. Here the subjective attachments of workers to their job, and more importantly to their labor emerged as the primary object to control for management. As I will expand in the following section, Lacanian psychoanalysis helps me to analyze this relationship between the attempts of control over the affective economy of laboring and the unstable affective surplus – *jouissance* – which fuels subjects’ desires and attachments.

Going back to the conceptualization of intimacy in relation to the affective economy of laboring, it is crucial to recognize how precarity as the absence of security and predictability, leaves the worker with fear in a work environment constantly under surveillance – via online technologies, cell phones, as well as personality inventories and regular performance evaluation meetings. Paolo Virno states that:

“fears of particular dangers, if only virtual ones, haunt the workday like a mood that cannot be escaped. This fear, however, is transformed into an operational requirement, a special tool of the trade. Insecurity about one’s place during periodic innovation, fear of losing recently gained privileges,

and anxiety about being ‘left behind’ translate into flexibility, adaptability, and, a readiness of reconfigure oneself”⁷³.

Such an individualized relation with one’s job may not be an utterly new phenomenon for the modern work life but the scope of it is an extension of the traditional identification with particular job through personal, emotional and affective ties. The reason is the fact that the relation with work is no more a relation with a particular job or simply to be employed in a corporation; but rather to be ‘employable’ regardless of being employed or not. What is inherent in the neoliberal moral discourse, which holds unemployment as a personal fault of the unemployed herself, is that being employed is one’s responsibility. This implies that looking for a job, life-long learning through getting new certificates, adapting oneself to changing work opportunities or job requirements become part of the job itself – i.e. individual responsibilities and achievements. Here resides the intimate relationship to one’s labor as a requirement for professionals.

Melissa Gregg, in *Work’s Intimacy*, stresses two interrelated but paradoxical trends which complicate the relationship between the labor regime and the intimacy of work for the salaried employees: on the one hand, the increased flexibility of the labor market and the destruction of long term employment in one company makes the employment more precarious for lower and middle level managers, and on the other, work becomes increasingly intimate especially through online communication technologies through which it invades workers’ life and blurs the time of work and life⁷⁴. The job insecurity undermines the imaginary of educated employees who can no longer expect a linear career path in company hierarchy. Rather, the skills to be

⁷³ Paolo Virno, “The Ambivalence of Disenchantment,” in *Radical Thought in Italy*, ed. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). p. 17 .

⁷⁴ Melissa Gregg, *Work’s Intimacy* (London: Polity Press, 2011).

acquired for professional success becomes the know-how of dealing with sudden layoffs, perpetual suspense and, also, technological developments like new softwares, mailing formats, and alike. In other words, this insecurity and unpredictability fuels a self-entrepreneurship in terms of life-long education, self-auditing and self-management together with the ‘emotional resilience’ to everyday challenges of work. Hence, the employees’ investment in work and subsequent exhaustion oblige them to “retain a sense of privacy” which became the basis for useful strategies of survival in “a network office with its never-ending flow of information and communication demands”⁷⁵. Gregg analyzes the different ways in which workers aim to retain a private space in order to cope with increasingly personalized work requirements. I argue that one source of this sense of privacy is the intimate relation that the individual worker establishes with her labor in the sense of being ‘naturally’, ‘intimately’ appropriate for a particular job. In the following chapter, I will focus on how this intimate relationship is always mediated through consulting firms, personality inventories, employment agencies, performance criteria and other ‘human resources management’ technologies. This last aspect becomes crucial for understanding how the white-collar labor is attempted to be controlled, managed, and captured by capital in corporations through various technologies targeting this very intimate space between individual workers and their interactive and intellectual labor. It is also important for underlining the fact that the personal register itself is defined and parceled through a very impersonal mechanism that is human resources management. Hence, taking as our object of study these standardized, almost bureaucratic mechanisms and apparatuses of HR management

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

will help me question the pre-given divide they assume between the inner and the outer, the personal and the impersonal, the private and the public.

Lauren Berlant's conceptualization of intimacy and of 'the intimate public'⁷⁶ will be helpful in my analysis of intimacy in the world of corporations. Berlant states that "the inwardness of the intimate is met by a corresponding publicness"⁷⁷. The desire for a good life passes through institutions of intimacy, such as friendship or family which are taken to be long lasting relationships "within zones of familiarity and comfort". She challenges this view of intimacy as the realm of real life (opposed to the realm of collective life posited outside the fantasy of 'good life' and hence intimacy) since it conceals the ambivalence that this affective space entails:

the unavoidable troubles, the distractions and disruptions that make things turn out in unpredicted scenarios. Romance and friendship inevitably meet the instabilities of sexuality, money, expectation, and exhaustion, producing, at the extreme, moral dramas of estrangement and betrayal, along with terrible spectacles of neglect and violence even where desire, perhaps, endures.⁷⁸

In *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, Berlant conceptualizes what she calls the 'intimate public sphere' in the USA, focusing on the era from the Reagan government onwards, which secured an intimacy rhetoric that equated the citizenship to a mode of voluntarism and privacy⁷⁹. Such a privatization of citizenship goes hand in hand with the impersonality of the national power. In other words, the normativity of being a good citizenship and having a good life is generated by the national

⁷⁶ see Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*, Series Q (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

⁷⁷ Lauren Berlant, "Intimacy: A Special Issue," *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (Winter 1998), pp. 281–88.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 281.

⁷⁹ Berlant, "Introduction: The Intimate Public Sphere", *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*. p. 1-25.

culture machine, which stands on a rhetoric of intimacy. Relying on this understanding of intimate public sphere, I will elaborate on the paradox of the managerial discourse in the following chapter. On the one hand, the workers are asked to invest more in the jobs they perform following the ‘fit’ between the particular job and worker’s ‘personal’ characteristics and commitment. On the other hand, this mystified ‘fit’ between the two is constantly attempted to be measured by various human resources management technologies which formulate standardized abstractions about particular personalities, performances, emotions, affective states and their match with particular job requirements in pseudo-scientific manner. Hence, the following chapter is about the functioning of this ‘corporate culture machine’ through the intimate relation that the workers are supposed to establish with their own work performances, which in turn are measured and controlled by the management.

Melissa Gregg states that “...collegial relations are less a matter of striving for genuine communication or attachment as they are maintaining a sense of ambivalent and polite detachment given the uncertainties of the employment landscape.”⁸⁰ She relies on Alan Liu’s work on knowledge workers where he equates ‘corporate’ with ‘user-friendliness’ and emphasizes the temporality of precarious employment conditions that lead to transitory socialities, where the collegial relations rests on simply being ‘user-friendly’ to each other. What she calls “compulsory friendship”⁸¹ or “enforced intimacy”⁸² describes this superficial,

⁸⁰ Melissa Gregg, “On Friday Night Drinks: Workplace Affects in the Age of the Cubicle,” in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 265.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 261.

⁸² Gregg, *Work’s Intimacy*. p. 74.

“compulsory sociality of the office”⁸³. Although my use of intimacy is heavily informed by Gregg and Berlant, my focus on the self-organization of *white-collars* in Istanbul enables me not only to provide a descriptive account of the office sociality that relies on an ‘enforced intimacy’ or an ‘intimacy rhetoric’ through various mechanisms, but also to look for the constitution of an alternative collegiality among *white-collars* through revealing this superficiality in the workplace imbued with secrets. Two basic claims around which *white-collars* unite are the followings: rather than keeping secrets in an intimate relationship with work – which can only be known by capital – workers are invited to keep secrets between themselves to be united around and constitute their political subjectivities against capital. Secondly they challenge the fantasy of having a real life outside work – by challenging the dichotomy between intimacy and public, which is undermined by contemporary work relations. As I argue in Chapter IV, the self-organization of *white-collars* relies on a constitution of a new intimate space for workers, who challenge the ‘enforced intimacy’ by redefining intimacy in the very act of sharing corporate secrets that shape workers’ relations to their labor and the mediations of the sociality at work. Hence, following the excess of the affective economy of laboring, which opens a new space in the platform, I will analyze particular mechanisms through which workers constitute their political subjectivity in *Plaza Action Platform*.

Subjectivity and Affective Surplus

“[T]he immediately social dimension of the exploitation of living immaterial labour immerses labour in all relational elements that define the social but also at the same time activate the critical elements that develops the potential of insubordination and revolt through the entire set of laboring practices.”⁸⁴

⁸³ Gregg, “On Friday Night Drinks: Workplace Affects in the Age of the Cubicle.”, p. 253.

⁸⁴ Hardt and Negri, *Empire*., p. 29.

As will become clear in the next chapter, the human resources management techniques in corporations provide an ideal self-image for employees through the skills assessment schemas they use and because they produce knowledge about the competences of an individual worker. However, a closer look into the intimate control over the everyday affective economy of laboring in corporations, and analyzing how individual workers experience and relate to their work, entails more than the ideal image that is pictured by human resources practices and leads us to see complicated strategies by workers and management alike, co-constituting the social world of corporations together with the agency of management devices that attempt to represent certain traits of the workers in particular forms. Rather than presume rational subjects who are able to name, manage their emotions for particular ends as managerial literature and technologies represent workers, I will try to illuminate how worker subjectivities are constituted in between the ideal images and everyday strategies that blur them. The underlying premise is a psychoanalytical one, which challenges narratives about the formation of subjectivity through consistent identifications. Psychoanalytical theory urges us to focus on the affective attachments that both sustain and disrupt subjection processes in any given social field. Given the conceptual framework of intimacy that I outlined above, I have already implied that the sociality that is attempted to be constituted and captured by corporate machine always produce an excess. Although this aspect is acknowledged by Hardt and Negri when they theorize the immanent form of resistance to the global form of sovereignty in terms of multitude, they do not elaborate on specific mechanisms of subjectivity construction which fuels subjective attachments. The affective economy of laboring which sustains (and also disrupts) this very sociality entails various modalities through which workers relate to their (social) labor power.

What will be emphasized throughout the following two chapters is the multiplicity of affective states that are materialized in the sociality generated but not fully captured by the corporate machine.

Corporation as one particular form of organizing the affective surplus will be put under scrutiny not solely in order to reveal and trace the antagonism between capital and the collective power of living labor but also the antagonism that divides all attempts to organize this collective power of living labor. Thus I proceed from “the irreducible impossibility of instituting harmonious and fully reconciled organization of the production, appropriation, and distribution of social surplus (whether it takes the form of labor, the value form, or use values).”⁸⁵. From this perspective, what is called the corporate sociality is one form of the commune, a capitalist one, which furthermore can only be understood in terms of the ways in which subjective attachments are channeled to inhabit it. Lacanian psychoanalysis provides important insights in this regard; it urges to analyze the corporate form (and its corresponding subjectivity formation processes) from this fundamental impossibility of reconciling social (thus class) antagonism, which is constantly attempted to be domesticated and controlled. The very institution of any sociosymbolic order, within which the subjects are represented by signifiers to other signifiers, generates a surplus-enjoyment, which attempt to symbolize (or control) the matter of affect in its various modalities. Accordingly, I will be analyzing the modality through which workers in *Plaza Action Platform* relate to the affective economy of laboring in following chapters.

⁸⁵ Yahya Madra and Ceren Özselçuk, “Jouissance and Antagonism In the Forms of the Commune: A Critique of Biopolitical Subjectivity,” *Rethinking Marxism* 22, no. 3 (2010), p. 489.

Conclusion

In the first part of this chapter, I described how the lower level managerial workers reclaim the traditional term ‘white-collar’ to define themselves. This re-definition of the term both reveals the ambiguities inherent in its old usages and provides insights for the conceptualization of their labor and subjectivity. To this end, I brought together the concept of ‘immaterial labor’ and the evolution of management as a science which involves the efficient management of workers’ emotions. By using the concept of affect, I treated the labor process in terms of an affective economy of laboring where the ‘emotions’ should not be taken to be residing in the ‘inner’, ‘authentic’ selves of the workers but rather to be constantly in circulation, mediated through various managerial mechanisms and constitutive of the corporate machine - both sustaining and disrupting it. In this regard, workers’ subjective attachments to ‘work’ will be scrutinized by a focus on the intimate relation that they establish with their labor and how the managerial mechanisms intervenes, attempts to codify this attachment in particular ways. Next chapter will offer an analysis of the corporate techniques through which workers’ intimate relation to work is attempted to be captured. I will focus on the particular affective states of workers in order to reveal how this attempt relies on a displacement of control onto the social relations in the workplace and that it can never fully capture the excess produced by the affective economy of laboring.

CHAPTER III

INTIMACY AND CONTROL AT WORK

Introduction

I met Melisa when she got in touch with PEP to learn about how to sue a case of mobbing after she was fired in September 2012. She had changed four jobs in the last three years and had decided to become a yoga teacher by the time I did an in-depth interview with her. After having worked two years in a Middle Eastern airlines corporation, she could not refuse her parents' demand to stay in Istanbul and applied for a job in a Turkish airlines corporation. She worked as a planning assistant for training programs of flight attendants but at the end of nine months she was forced to resign due to the mobbing by her director. She told me that the HR director under which she was employed constantly humiliated her; she was told to have inadequate performance and forced to work overtime on Sunday mornings in addition to the weekdays. Since she took the advice of her sister who is a graduate of labor economics, she did not resign and she was eventually fired. Then she quickly found a flight attendant position in another airlines company in order to show her ex-employers that she is employable enough – although it was a lower position, she told me that she got satisfied not from the job but from encountering her ex-director with pride when she went to her old workplace to receive certain documents for a new job. After another six months, she decided that a more boring, monotonous but less tiring and demanding 'office job' would be more suitable for her. Through a private

employment agency, she found a “director assistantship position” in a multinational corporation – to which she referred as “a fancy title” for secretary. This time she was fired in less than a year due to the downsizing decision of the corporation. At the end of a period of four months of unemployment, she found another job through linkedIn as a training planner in a multinational food company. She was formally employed by a subcontractor, which prevented her from claiming the same rights as those of the staff of the corporation – basically job security, wage level and other benefits. This time she could not stand “the constant feeling of stress” stemming from the mobbing by the director who was “exerting mental terror” on her and she resigned in 6 months with a decision of suing a case of mobbing. At the end of such a ‘career path’, Melisa decided that ‘working in a corporation’ (*kurumsal bir firmada çalışmak*) is not appropriate for her and she dedicated herself to yoga, hoping to become a teacher and earn money from what she likes to perform; to have a job she enjoys performing. Like many other participants, what brought her to PEP was feeling insecure and deprived of any solidarity network when dealing with ‘humiliating’ and ‘indignifying’ practices which need to be kept secret.

In the preceding chapters, I have discussed the labor market formation in Turkey after 1990s and how a precarious labor regime is being institutionalized for the increasing number of university graduate, lower level managerial workers. I suggested precarity as a useful concept to inquire into the insecure condition which structures not only contemporary conditions of work, but more importantly the affective states, leading us to question the boundary between work and life. Following the conceptualization of immaterial labor in relation to the managerial knowledge, I argued that the social relations at work become both the object and the subject of the production process. However, I stressed the fact that the corporate

attempts to control the affective economy of laboring through which white-collar subjectivities are produced relies on managerial techniques which target the intimate relation each individual worker is supposed to have with his/her own labor. Hence, the human resources management techniques should be seen as mediators of this affective economy and the resulting effects of their attempt to control the sociality at work should be analyzed.

Accordingly, this and the following chapters focus on different control mechanisms at work in/around/through the corporations following the organization of the *Plaza Action Platform* in order to decipher the complicated functioning of the corporate machine and the formation of white collar worker subjectivity in Istanbul. In this regard Melisa's story shows a basic mechanism that is analyzed in this thesis: how the workers relate to their labor in emotionally intense, intimate ways and simultaneously lack long lasting, stable and secure relations in a precarious labor regime. In other words, Melisa's every tireless search for a new job relies on intimate ways through which she invests to particular job requirements; however the corporate attempts of controlling this intimacy relies on various techniques that structures the sociality at work, which is sustained and disrupted by the affective economy that can never be fully controlled.

In the following section, I analyze how an intimate relationship between the individual worker and a particular job is being established from job applications onwards to constitute a 'committed' worker. I argue that such an intimacy becomes a requirement in the corporate work life where 'Human Resources Management' (HRM) as a particular apparatus penetrates into this intimate space to manage workers' desires and the affective economy they sustain in a corporate machine. Self-management of workers, as a foundational job requirement, is institutionalized

through ‘performance systems’ designed to evaluate and manipulate workers’ ‘personality’ indicators; their self at work in relation to their ‘authentic’ self; their ‘management of emotions’ in Horchschild’s words or ‘emotional competence’ in Illouz’s. I claim that this affective control does not simply target a rational individual worker who acts on the basis of decisions and is able to name and manage his/her feelings. As Yanagisako states, affect was always central to production relations⁸⁶, and in the case of office workers and *white-collars* in Istanbul, the communicative aspect of their labor becomes the target of the human resources management techniques in the complexity of the social relations. Accordingly I focus on privacy, mobbing and firing mise-en-scenes as three important mechanisms which reveal the intricate functioning of the corporate culture machine constantly attempting to make the sociality at work more productive for capital.

To be appropriate for a particular job

Making ‘personality inventories’, revealing and evaluating personality traits, making at least three interviews (in some cases up to eight or nine) and keeping the candidate wait for some months have become conventional methods for corporations in the hiring processes. Such a system of evaluation confirms that finding a job is not ‘easy’ even for ‘qualified employees’ in a country where 25% of the university graduates are unemployed⁸⁷. It contributes to an image that every worker is special for the company in which s/he works; that the hierarchical structure of employment

⁸⁶ Sylvia Yanagisako, “Immaterial and Industrial Labor: On False Binaries in Hardt and Negri’s Trilogy,” *Focaal - Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology*, no. 64 (2012), p. 20.

⁸⁷ Bora, “Herkes İşsiz Ama Seninki Farklı: Türkiye’de Beyaz Yakalı İşsizliğine Genel Bir Bakış (Everyone Is Unemployed But Yours Is Different: A General Overview of White Collar Unemployment in Turkey.”, p. 51.

is designed (and reconfigured when necessary) according to the sophisticatedly calculated needs and desires of the company and how well these are performed by employees with different personalities and different titles of managerial positions. This narrative also includes the possibility of redefinition of these corporate needs according to the employee's actions in terms of what they put into the corporate functioning like 'originality', 'creativity', 'solutions' etc. As I will discuss in the next section, the crucial question of performance appraisal meetings targets directly this last point: 'what did you put into the job from yourself?' ('*işe kendinden ne kattın?*'). Here, I want to stress how the companies use this knowledge of 'personal features' or 'personality traits' to enhance the competition among employees.

Labor market for university graduate *white-collars* consist mostly of websites and private employment agencies through which candidates make job applications. When one wants to apply for a job, s/he first needs to upload his/her curriculum vitae and second, submit a – usually online – 'personality inventory'⁸⁸. Human Resources employees' duty is to find the most appropriate candidate for an open job position according to the skills and personality of the candidates. Every position has its own requirements; in addition to the job description and required skills, director's or manager's demands are also considered in this process. For example, an HR employee described this as follows:

For example, when they search someone who is competent for the job, the director comes and asks a profile test. And we obtain a mapping of his characteristics: is he easy going or dominant, does he give emotional reactions or supports the statusquo... There are many versions of it, maybe you heard about DISC, you can see it in almost every job posting now. Anyway, you give the guy this analysis that we call a map. Then he asks for someone who is close to that. In other words he says "I want someone who

⁸⁸ DISC is the most used personality inventory in these websites and agencies; an anonymous example of the detailed reports sent to the employers can be accessed from: http://www.powerhrm.com/va72/disc/f3_disc_report.hrm?tid=1820418&reff=1 (accessed on 05 May 2012)

can get on well with me”. This time you discard all the competences and start to look for someone who would not argue with Mr. Ahmet, would not be too ambitious and have an eye on his position.⁸⁹

Although the job requirements and the desired personality can vary across a variety of positions, all the applicants are encouraged to construct a consistent narrative for their fit in a particular job, technically and ‘personally’ (usually defined by HRM as the fit between the personality of a person and the job). Every candidate is expected to narrate why s/he chooses that particular job in the interviews, they have to prove how they are ‘naturally appropriate’ for it through their potentials to be realized and why they will be happy in doing that job. Even though the unemployed graduates do not ideally choose one specific sector or position to apply, they prepare specific answers to this crucial question as indicated in every guide of job interview.

I wasn’t distinguishing at all, I was applying everywhere! “Why did you choose this?” was the question I encountered in every job interview: why human resources, why marketing, why retail... I was answering to each of them with different stories: human resources because humans are the most crucial resources for corporations; marketing is the gate which opens to the external world; retail because without selling a company cannot survive... These were somewhat standard stories that you see in many websites and forums. But they also ask questions like “are you nervous?”. When I said no to this, the next question was “do you get angry easily?”. Again I replied no and this time the question was “how do you handle with a nervous person?”. I said I would convince him or her. Can you give an example from your own life? Then I talk about my imaginary boyfriend who was very nervous and how I manage to convince him by the help of long phrases...⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Ferda, workshop on performance systems, 27.11.2011 *Mesela kağıt üzerinde güya istedikleri işi yapacak yetinlikte insan arıyorlar fakat yönetici kendine bir profil testi yaptırıyor ve o testte bi harita çıkıyo. Uyumlu mu, dominant mı, duygusal tepkiler veren biri mi yoksa statükocu mu... çeşitli şeyleri var bunun; DISC testini belki duymuşsunuzdur, kariyer ilanlarında bu dönem çok var. Adama haritayı veriyosunuz, bu haritaya yakın birini istiyorum diyo. Yani “benimle geçinecek birini arıyorum”. Bu sefer siz bütün yetkinlikleri bir kenara bırakıp, aynı ofiste çalışırken Ahmet beyin çok ayağına dolanmayacak, çok yırtıcı olup da onun yerine göz koymayacak birini bulabilir miyim telaşına düşüyorsunuz*

⁹⁰ Elif, 25.11.2012 *Hiç ayırmıyodum ya, her yere başvuruyordum! ‘Neden bunu tercih ettin?’, başvurduğum pozisyon neyse artık –her yere başvurduğum için –: neden insan kaynakları, neden pazarlama, neden satış gibi... ben de herbirine ayrı bir hikaye yazarak cevap veriyordum: İnsan kaynakları çünkü bence insan bir işletme için en önemli kaynak; pazarlama işletmenin dış dünyaya açılan kapısı; satış için de, tabii ki satış olmazsa bir işletme ayakta kalamaz... gibi böyle herbirine kılıf uydurarak, hikaye yazarak cevaplıyordum. Onları zaten duyuyorsun, görüyorsun sitelerde, forumlarda. Bir de diyolar ki sinirli misin? Yoo değilim, dedim. Çabuk sinirlenir misin? Yoo, çabuk sinirlenmem. Ondan sonra peki sinirli bir insanla nasıl baş edersin? Yani ikna etmeye çalışırım falan.*

For most of the applicants who search a job of a lower level managerial position like Elif above, who narrates her job search after university, the question of uniqueness is not taken seriously. They admit that the system is based on some assumptions and they have to play their role as a perfect-to-be employee. An interesting discussion on this topic has taken place in the workshop of PEP on job interviews. Participants started to complain about the search of ‘being naturally fit’ to the job; they defined this as feeling obliged to show that one is ‘naturally’ appropriate for a particular job. They had the impression that the questions, tests or role playing exercises they face in the interviews target to analyze their ‘authentic’ selves in order to find out whether they are appropriate to handle a particular job or not. After discussing for a while this aspect and what kind of techniques they were faced with, workers started to claim that they make use of some ‘personality traits’ in the job interviews – as well as in their work life – according to the demands of the managers as far as they make sense of them. One worker explained this in the workshop as follows:

The situation in which we found ourselves requires to perform what the person we face wants to see. You don’t care whether you will be happy if employed there or whether that job suits you or not; because you are unemployed. Even though I am not an extraverted person, in job interviews I act as if I am the most extraverted person.⁹¹

Although the desire to be ‘naturally appropriate’ to a job dominates the discourse of human resources departments and companies, both sides aim to see how the worker can perform a ‘naturally appropriate’ candidate. As Şentürk claims,

Mesela hayatından bir örnek verebilir misin? Olmayan sinirli bir erkek arkadaşından bahsediyorum, uzun cümlelerle ikna ettim falan diyorum...

⁹¹ Osman, 17.11.2012 *Karşıdaki insanın senden beklediği rolü yapma hali, yılışık bir süreç ama yapmamız lazım, ileride mutlu olup olmama o işin sana uygun olup olmaması falan umrunda değil, çünkü işsizsin. Ben dışa dönük bir insan değilsem bile en dışadönük benmişim gibi görünmeye çalışıyorum.*

As a matter of fact, people who do the interview can also know that the person they face ‘performs a role’, ‘acts the fool’. After all, these people were interviewed as well. What is important is wanting to play this game and showing how well you play. Interviews as the entrance to the world of corporations, strategies of answering questions are bandied around professionals and candidates. (my translation)⁹²

This performative aspect of the work, starting from the job interviews, continues all along the work life inside the corporation. The worker needs to perform a ‘professional’ way of managing oneself in relation to her managers, co-workers, bosses etc., i.e. develop individual strategies for a good carrier. The discussion in the workshop continued and some workers who have been in job recruitment committees⁹³ stated the impossibility of receiving the ‘real’ answers:

People come and explain how much hardworking they are, how suitable they are to teamwork. I am really ashamed. I just look whether one knows the job given his/her experiences. I just want to understand that. First the experience, secondly one’s adaptation is important. But I feel ashamed since I see that the person is playing. I am not interested in any subject other than these two, I will not go out with him/her for a dinner or I will not sleep next to him/her... so I don’t care. Then I asked “could you describe where you would like to work?”. Because I want to warn if this is not the place s/he is looking for. If one says for example that s/he wants to be promoted in a short period of time, I would reply that we are three employees and there is no such thing as promotion. But when the answer to the question of one’s expectation from workplace, is another ready made one, I find myself asking “what do you really want?”. Unfortunately I cannot have real, sincere answers. Faced with this last question, people usually think that there is a trick...so it is very difficult to really communicate.⁹⁴

⁹² Yıldırım Şentürk, “İstanbul’da Şirketler Dünyasının Profesyonelleri,” *Toplum ve Bilim*, no. 126 (2013), p. 71.

⁹³ If the worker is a member of a small team in a department, he or she can become part of the committee in the selection of a new worker as a teammate.

⁹⁴ Selin, 17.11.2012 *İnsanlar karşıma gelip şunu anlatıyorlar; ne kadar iyi çalıştıklarını, ne kadar takım çalışmasına uygun olduklarını. Ben o kadar utanıyorum ki. Oysa ben deneyimli biriye işi biliyor mu ona bakarım. Onu anlamak istiyorum. Bir, deneyimli mi ikincisi, uyumu önemli. Utandım çünkü rol yapıyor karşıdaki, görüyorsun. Onun dışındaki konular beni ilgilendirmiyor, ben onunla akşam yemeğe çıkmayacağım ki, ya da birlikte uyumayacağım, başka şey umurumda değil. Sonra “nasıl bir yerde çalışmak istiyorsunuz” bunu sordum. Çünkü eğer kafasındaki bir yer değilse burası, ben söyleyeyim, ben yükselmek istiyorum hemen diyorsa, zaten burada 3 kişiyiz yükseleceğim diye bir şey yok sonuçta demek istiyorum, boşu boşuna zaman da almayayım. İş yerinden ne bekliyorsun dediğinde aldığım cevap hazır olunca, diyorum ki “gerçekten ne istiyorsun?”. Ama cevap alamıyorum ne yazık ki. Böyle bir soru sorduğumda, gerçekten cevap verse bunun da bir hile olabileceğini düşünüyor insanlar. Gerçekten iletişim kurmak çok zor oluyor.*

This was the reaction of Selin who was employed in the marketing department of a small branch of a pharmaceutical company. Since they were three people as the marketing team, when one of her co-workers left the company, she was asked to do interviews with the candidates sent from an employment agency. Her impossible search for ‘real answers’ makes clear how a candidate tries her/his best to play the role s/he thinks is the most appropriate. Because the searched criterion is not what he/she ‘really’ is but how well s/he plays and how motivated s/he is to play as claimed by Şentürk. In other words, the workers attempt to formulate a coherent narrative based on the appropriateness of their authentic self to the particular job.

Hence, more than the technical skills as impersonal capabilities, how these skills are embedded in a particular individual whose ‘personality’ reflects the possible actualizations of potentials, become the ‘objective’ knowledge through which the company evaluates the worker who can in turn – and will be obliged to – evaluate oneself. The ‘personality inventories’ and the criteria through which the performance of the workers is evaluated in the ‘performance appraisal meetings’ aim to constitute this objective knowledge about worker’s ‘personality’ and its fit to the job. This periodically updated – thanks to the performance systems – knowledge forms the ground on which such a coherent narrative is constructed and the ‘ideal’ is constantly updated and/or redefined. This enables both the worker and the corporation to manipulate certain traits in favor of a perfect match between a particular person and a particular job. So self-management becomes a responsibility for the worker who is supposed to improve herself at her job in ‘a mode of

voluntarism and privacy’⁹⁵. ‘Commitment’ becomes an important keyword in this respect: being a committed employee means that the worker puts his ‘soul’ to the work, makes use of her/his own ‘personal’ capacities and communicative skills efficiently for capital. Hence corporate ‘human resources management’ (HRM) practices aim to penetrate one’s private relation to work and target this very intimate space between the worker and his/her labor. This is why the crucial question in the performance appraisal meetings that I describe below is ‘what did you put into the job from yourself?’ (*işe kendinden ne kattın?*). However, as I will analyze in the second half of the chapter, this control of the affective economy of laboring urges us to take into account the sociality at work and its underlying multiplicity of affects.

Performance Appraisal Meetings

The use of performance evaluation systems started in the beginning of 1990s in Turkey in a few multinational corporations and then became widespread in 2000s. None of the workers that I did in-depth interviews and very few workers in the platform workshop on the performance systems believed that the performance evaluation results have significant effects on strategic decisions of the corporations regarding promotions or pay raises. Many stated that corporations show the inadequate performance of workers as a conventional firing reason.

They fired 100 workers in F Bank last week, and the reason was inadequate performance of each of them. I mean they gave the performance grades and those who got 1 – which means that they need more training – were all fired. Once I was working in an insurance company, there was performance evaluation on the basis of each directorate. The head office told that each directorate must give the grade 1 to one worker and that worker will be fired.

⁹⁵ As I explained in Chapter II, I derive this formulation for corporate culture from Laurent Berlant’s analysis of ‘intimate public’ in Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*.

Low performance can be a reason for massive layoffs, in this sense performance evaluation becomes a tool.⁹⁶

Similar to Serkan who is employed in an insurance company, Tekin who works in a multinational bank told me that there exists a curve system in the performance appraisals and each time there has to be some workers who got the lowest grades.

Performance appraisal meetings, in most of the companies that the PEP participants are employed, are held twice a year. However they are part of a surveillance system which comprehends all the work life of the workers throughout the year. Starting from the tollgates where workers need to use their cards to enter into the company and the camera systems in open offices and high-tech buildings, they are constantly coded in electronic records of the corporation. Besides these widespread security apparatus, companies use different surveillance technologies in different jobs. For example, online systems in which workers need to sign in when they work form another mechanism aiming to follow workers. Sezen who is employed in a bank told me how the workers have to fill an excel sheet prepared by the ‘performance management’ unit of HR department every day:

Our work hour is normally 8 hours, and they evaluate our performance on the basis of a 6,5 hours working time. We register that by ourselves. There is an excel sheet designed by a unit called ‘Performace Management’. We cannot modify certain cells, we cannot erase or add up but we register. When I put that I did one ‘charge back’, its timing comes automatically. If I put a meeting, I should enter its duration by myself. At the end of the day, for example it turns out to be 4,5 hours, they calculate efficiency in terms of its proportion to 6,5 hours. They download the data monthly from this system and announce the highest and lowest grades. Performance Management controls these excel sheets. Sometimes I really work hard without standing up, we can assume that I only go to the toilet or to take a cup of tea two or three times. But I got a performance of 80%. I become surprised, I mean I

⁹⁶ Serkan, workshop on performance systems, 27.11.2011. *Mesela geçen hafta fbank'ta 100 kişiyi işten çıkarttılar, nedeni de performans düşüklüğü. Yani performansları notlarını vermişler ve 1 olanları, yani eğitim görmesi gerekenleri işten çıkartıyorlar. Daha önce ben bir sigorta şirketinde çalışıyordum, onda da mesela müdürlük bazında performans yapıyorduk, her müdürlükten birisine 1 vereceksiniz, biz de onu çıkartacağız demişlerdi. Toplu işten çıkarma nedeni performans düşüklüğü olabiliyor, performans ölçümleri bu anlamda bir araç oluyor*

was sitting all day long here, on my desk and I worked. And I think I write them in the excel. Some of them are fixed, already calculated, an average is set, you just enter the job, the minutes it takes is taken as given. I ask myself are they miscalculated or was I slow at performing them? Didn't I do all? Did I really enter all of them? I am constantly questioning myself...⁹⁷

Another worker from an audit company, Bade, explained how a software they call 'communicator', is used by the managers to control the employees.

Basically the aim is to control whether you are working on your computer or not. Your director cannot always be with you, she has other teams to audit. But she can ask you from there: for how long you have not been actively using the computer? When you are using it, like being online, the software is open. She sends you to a company for auditing, but there is a possibility that you go and work at home or somewhere else. But your director can control you virtually through using 'communicator' even if she is not physically next to you. So you become constantly 'available' at any instance. Instead of sending an e-mail, she sends her message through communicator... this speeds up the work but it also increases the pressure on me. There is also a webcam utility that she sometimes asks me to use.⁹⁸

This software registers the hours that the worker has spent for an audit and makes her available for the demands of her manager when she is not at the workplace. These kinds of constant surveillance mechanisms made possible by the communication technologies oblige the workers to manage themselves in becoming "more

⁹⁷ Sezen, 16.12.2012. *Normal çalışma saatimiz 8 saat, ama 6,5 saat üstünden çalışma saatine göre verimliliğini ölçüyorlar, onu da biz kayıt ediyoruz. 'Performans yönetimi' diye bir birimin oluşturduğu bir excel var, bazı yerlerine müdahale edemiyoruz, ekleyemiyoruz silemiyoruz falan ama kayıt yapıyoruz. Bir charge back yaptım yazıyorum, otomatik süresi çıkıyor. Toplantıya girdim dersem şu kadar dakika diye yazmam gerek. Gün sonunda atıyorum 4,5 saat çıkıyor, 6,5a göre oranlayıp verimlilik buluyorlar. Bunu aylık çekiyorlar sistemden ve ay sonunda yükseklerle düşükleri duyuruyorlar. Performans yönetimi bu excelleri kontrol ediyor. Bazen gerçekten yerimden kalkmadan çalışıyorum, 2-3 kez tuvalete ve çay almaya gittiğimi varsayabiliriz sadece. Buna rağmen performansım %80 çıkıyor. Kendi kendime şaşıyorum, yani ben bütün gün burda oturdum ve iş yaptım, yazdığımı da zannediyorum şunu yaptım bunu yaptım gibi. Bazıları da sabit, daha önceden hesaplanmış, bir ortalama alınmış, sen sadece işi giriyorsun, onun dakikası verili kabul ediliyor. Acaba diyorum onlar mı yanlış ölçülmüş ya da ben onları mı yavaş yaptım? Hepsini yapmadım mı? Girmedim mi? Kendimi sorgular haldeyim yani sürekli...*

⁹⁸ Bade, 25.05.2013. *Sürekli senin bilgisayar başında oturup oturmadığını kontrol etmek amacı aslında. Müdürün hep yanında olamayabiliyor sonuçta, denetleyeceği başka ekipleri de var. Seni ordan şey yapabiliyor: ne kadardır bilgisayarın başında yoksun? Sonuçta bilgisayar başındayken online olmak gibi o program açık oluyor. Seni bir yere denetime gönderiyor ama ben evime de gidip çalışabilirim ya da başka bir şekilde de ama müdürün fiziksel olarak yanında olmasa da sanal olarak seni kontrol edebiliyor bu programla. Sürekli ordan ulaşılabilir oluyorsun, 'available' oluyorsun her an. Mail atacak, onu communicator'dan atıyor... bu işi hızlandırıyor ama benim üzerimdeki baskıyı da artırıyor. Kamera da var bu programda, bunu açmanı da isteyebiliyor.*

productive” for the corporation. Bade told me that once she signs in, she feels a pressure to finish the job as fast as possible since it is under the virtual presence of her boss who sends her instant messages asking the progress she has done and reminding her other work she is responsible. Sezen explained how she tries her best to increase her daily percentage of efficiency; but each time she feels inadequate and realizes that she has to improve herself to be a better, more efficient employee. These individualized control mechanisms intensify the demands of work, which becomes a never-ending process. Although these percentages provide the amount of work done by the worker and claim to be an ‘objective’ measurement of efficiency, they are also the means through which corporations penetrate into the intimate space between the worker and her living labor. They become the indicators of the worker’s commitment; desire to be a successful employee (*çalışan*).

The performance evaluations can take different forms in companies around the same principles. The highest grades are told to be ‘legendary’ by workers in the sense that they have never seen anyone who get it. Sezen describes the grading as follows:

There was a system of 5 grades: 1 as the best and 5 as indicating that you are not supposed to be here. 4 is bad, when you get more than two or three times they could cancel your contract. There were 3, 3p and 3t. 3 meant that you are what you should be, how it is expected. 3p is 3 plus, 3t is 3 top. Same for 2. For example if 3 means doing what is assigned to you, 2 means like you do even if the work is not assigned to you. Plus means you put something from yourself, if you got a top, you are ‘brightening, polishing’ (*parlatmak, cilalamak*)... but we don’t know what 1 means since we did not have someone who got it! It is kind of miracle for us!⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Sezen, 16.12.2012 *5li puan sistemi vardı, 1 çok süper, 5 de aslında senin burda olmaman gerekiyor. 4 kötü, birkaç tane 4 alınca iş akdi feshi gibi şeyler olabiliyordu. 3p, 3 ve 3t vardı. 3 olması gerektiği gibi, beklendiği gibi bir insansın demektir. 3p 3plus ve 3t top. 2 de de aynı şekilde; 2p 2t vardı. Mesela 3 sana verilen işi yapmaksa, 2 iş sana verilemese de yapamk gibi. Plusta kendinden birşeyler katıyorsun, topta parlatıyorsun cilalıyorsun... ama 1in ne olduğunu bilmiyoruz, çünkü hiç 1 alan olmadı bizde!! 1 baya mucize bizim için*

Although the grading – letters or numbers – can vary, the principle is the idea of giving better grades for the ones performing ‘more than necessary’. The average grade means that the worker does what is given as it is simply supposed to be (*yapman gerektiği gibi*). Then the question of a good performance of a committed employee becomes what the worker put into the job from herself (*işe kendinden ne kattın?*): “No one appreciates when you do your job as you should, they always expect something more. Even in an operational job, they ask what you put to them as an extra”¹⁰⁰. This commitment corresponds basically to the expectation of some personal effort increasing productivity; not directly demanded by the corporation but put voluntarily by the worker herself. As I explained in the first section of the chapter on job interviews, the question of the worker being ‘personally’ appropriate for a particular job reemerges as an important component in the functioning of corporate organization. In other words, the intimate relation that the worker is supposed to have with her/his job becomes the measure for her/his employability and constitutes a space manageable for the corporation.

Both William Whyte in *Organization Man* and C. Wright Mills in *White Collar*¹⁰¹ depict the executives or higher-level managers in the conditions of the office work in 1950s, as committing themselves to the work by narrating it as their own desire. Similarly, the studies on ‘golden-collars’ or ‘transnational class’ in Turkey after 1990s, researching higher level manager’s relation to their jobs highlight the commitment of these managers to the work as the alignment of the

¹⁰⁰ Elif, workshop on performance systems, 27.11.2011 *Gerçekten yapman gereken işi yaptığın zaman, kimse seni takdir etmiyo performans değerlendirmede, bi üstünü bekliyorlar sürekli. Operasyonel bi işte bile ekstra ne katıyorsun sen bize diye soruyorlar*

¹⁰¹ Mills, *White Collar. The American Middle Classes*; William H. Whyte, *The Organization Man* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963).

needs of the corporation and their desires to be good managers¹⁰². As Gregg states, today “ordinary workers and the most junior employees show the habits and dispositions of Whyte’s executives”¹⁰³. She claims that the use of online technologies enable work to penetrate to what is supposed to be the ‘privacy’ of the employees by overtime working at home or in a café via laptop or cell phone. Online technologies like smart phones, provision of laptops or basic use of e-mails became important means through which workers easily connect to the work and ‘get the things done’. Bade told how her manager became excited (*gözleri ısıldıyor*) when she works after work at home and send an e-mail to her manager late at night. Elif, employed in a multinational research company, explained that her manager encourage them to take laptop and go home instead of working overtime in the office. She told that when her manager encounters her working in the office while she was leaving, she somehow implies that Elif is not capable to manage her time well and eventually becomes obliged to stay longer in the office. According to Elif, the projects they are working on cannot be done only by working within the duration of formal work hours and her manager also continues to work at home since the next day she usually tells about it to her team. This expected commitment defines the work for lower level office workers who try to satisfy these (intensified) demands by freeing work from the material workplace and making it present all over their life. However in most cases, both sides know that there exists no promise of a career or secure job in return for the employee’s commitment; the only reward is the job itself: the fact that the worker stays employable for the corporation.

¹⁰² Ilhan, “Turkish Transnational Business Professionals in Istanbul: Globalization, Cosmopolitanism and the Emerging Elite”; Şentürk, “İstanbul’da Şirketler Dünyasının Profesyonelleri (Professionals of the World of Corporations in Istanbul).”

¹⁰³ Gregg, *Work’s Intimacy*, p. 9.

As I stated in the previous chapter, Eva Illouz's emphasis on the 'making of emotional capitalism' highlights a dynamics through which economic relations become increasingly emotional and intimate relationships that are in turn subjected to economic cost-benefit calculation models¹⁰⁴. She shows how the most important quality of a good manager consists of a person's 'emotional competence' to manage social relations, communication at the workplace. Accordingly, the above mentioned job interview and performance appraisal meetings, regardless of the managerial positions of the workers, focus on the skills of the workers, not only 'technically' but also 'emotionally'. The HR apparatus has a claim of measuring not only the work done by the worker but also the capacities of the worker which stems from one's 'private', 'authentic' self; one's 'personality traits'. Similar to the job interviews, the performance appraisal meetings are held privately and are supposed to be kept private, not shared with co-workers. HR employees state that the companies have separate folders for each worker and register different outcomes periodically. In these private meetings and hidden personal documents, the above described measures of work are kept together with the personality traits of the workers, the latter as consisting of the indicators of a worker's emotional reactions in different situations, or "emotional competence" in Illouz's words.

Anxiety and Inadequacy

Hence management technologies in corporations target the self-management of workers through their technical skills combined with their 'personality'. They operate in intricate ways not only to manage individual workers but also to manage

¹⁰⁴ Illouz, *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism*.

social relations at work, the communication among workers which in turn affects workers' selves. In this sense 'management of emotions' as Horchschild uses it for the job performance of flight attendants¹⁰⁵, come into prominence for corporations but in a slightly different way. Members of PEP, workers at the 'open offices', do not interact with consumers like flight attendants or any other service workers but their labor processes consist of frequent use of various information and communication technologies through which they interact with other employees within or outside their own company; and also their face-to-face interaction with their co-workers and superiors shaped by various managerial mechanisms form an important part of their work.

The vague definition of the worker's performance covers her social relations at work. Sezen told me in the in-depth interview how she was fired from a media agency due to an unaccomplished requirement of 'smile at work', which she did not consider as a requirement before:

I was very happy at my job, I really liked it. But then when I had some personal problems in my life, I was upset for some time and then suddenly I was fired. I had a sullen face for about a week or so, my boss said that she doesn't want to see me at work with that face anymore. I was shocked.¹⁰⁶

Similar to Sezen, Elif explained how her smile became her job requirement as follows:

When I was working for less than one year, I had a performance evaluation meeting, which I then called evaluation of 'smiling eyes'. My director told me "we like you very much, your eyes are smiling and you are smiling.." That is how performance is evaluated in my workplace!¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Horchschild, *Managed Heart. Commercialization of Human Feeling*.

¹⁰⁶ Sezen, 16.12.2012 *Aslında gerçekten seviyordum o işi, hoştu, mutluydum. Sonra böyle bir depresyonlu bir dönemim oldu, bir hafta falan çok canım sıkındı. Ve bir anda kovuldum. Bir hafta falan asık suratla gitmişim işe, seni dedi bu suratınla görmek istemiyorum artık. Şok falan oldum, kekeledim.. iyi peki dedim kabul ettim.*

¹⁰⁷ Elif, workshop on performance systems, 27.11.2011 *Benim performans görüşmelerimde şöyle bişey olmuştu, 6,5-7 aydır çalışıyordum o zaman; "gülen gözler" performans değerlendirilmesi*

She told about this performance appraisal meeting during the workshop after an HR employee stated how she had to notify a dismissal to a worker who was seen as unsmiling by her superior. However being unsmiling and acting serious can also become a job requirement depending on the particular job. One women worker who participated to the workshop organized by the platform on job interviews explained why she resigned after working ten years in an advocacy firm. She told that over the years she became more and more a serious person in the company since her “serious manner” were encouraged and promoted¹⁰⁸. So, the question is not simply to make the workers smiling and pretty; rather different job positions and also different superiors and ‘corporate cultures’ (*kurum kültürü*) can require different emotional states which should be taken to be defined in concrete encounters. Beyond the cognitive management of emotions, what to display or hide, human resources management practices also intervene in affect. Rather than the fully rational attempts to measure and increase the ‘productive value of human capital’, managerial practices such as job interviews, performance appraisal meetings, layoff mise-en-scenes or unexpected outcomes like mobbing can be conceptualized as part of the corporate management of the affective economy of laboring which can never be fully controlled: “Management of and in an affective economy concerns the strategic administration and organization of relations to ensure the potential of the

demoştım mesela. Yöneticim demoştı ki biz seni çok seviyoruz, ne güzel gözlerinin içi gülüyo, gülümsüyorsun falan; böyle bir değerlendirme sistemi var bizim işyerinde

¹⁰⁸ Ayşe, workshop on performance systems, 27.11.2011 *Ben oradaki Ayşe’yi sevmiyordum, dediğim dedik sert biriydim orada, öyle yaptığım her şey övülüyordu...O kişi olmaktan sıkılmışım bir süre sonra*

organizational members to feel, experience, sense, act and create themselves and the organization in certain ways”¹⁰⁹.

In this regard, the intimate space I referred above, between the individual worker and the particular job she/he performs becomes an important control mechanism for the corporation and its human resources practices. In order to ensure an individualized workplace and competition among workers, human resources technologies aim to channel workers’ desires to improve themselves in their job, to be promoted in their career or to be an ideal and indispensable employee for the corporation. In other words, the corporation offers an ideal self-image to the worker through the human resources management; but the subjective investments of the workers in this ideal entail an affective economy as a result of which the workers’ desires are aimed to be aligned with the productivity and efficiency of the corporation. Performance appraisal meetings reveal how this affective economy can function.

Doing a workshop on performance system was decided by the platform after the workshop on anxiety where the performance appraisal meetings were claimed to be a major source of anxiety for most workers. In these private meetings, workers were faced with their measured performance and they were encouraged to envisage how they can improve themselves ideally for the corporation. And each time they find themselves insufficiently productive.

I become stressed in those meetings no matter what. Every time, this feeling of ‘I couldn’t’ pops-up! I try to remember my friends, our conversations. No one is relaxed. I don’t know whether it is because the people that I know. That meeting somehow turns into a situation in which the employee finds oneself inadequate. Last time we talked among friends and decided to say that our wages are low. But the majority of us could not say that. Because the

¹⁰⁹ Helle Bjerg and Dorthe Staunoes, “Self-Management Through Shame: Uniting Governmentality Studies and the ‘Affective Turn,’” *Ephemera* 11, no. 2 (2011), p. 143.

director is constantly criticizing you based on several indices that you cannot really control or explain.¹¹⁰

Feeling of inadequacy becomes a major obstacle for the worker to tell her problems to the manager who constantly criticizes her. Then the only way to complain about the work conditions or to make demands becomes to commit oneself (or pretend to be committed) to be an ideal worker who cannot be heavily criticized. Most of the members of the platform distance themselves from being subjects of this desire; they state that the performance system cannot count their labor because the labor process always exceeds a measurement. Beyond the question of how fair or efficient the measures of performance are, the very material practice of measuring it makes them anxious. The impossible targets or the never attained perfect grades make the worker feel inadequate. If “the production of subjectivity ceases to be only an instrument of social control ... and becomes directly productive”¹¹¹, then the production of inadequate subject can itself be productive for the corporation. But the productivity of this inadequateness does not simply mean more efficient functioning for the corporation. While the inadequacy can be taken for granted by many workers who believe that there will always be a more efficient and profitable work for the corporation, the circulation of affects through these encounters cannot be easily predicted. During the performance appraisal meetings period, workers state that the sociality of the workplace gets ‘more tense’ (*ortam gergin oluyor*), and collegial relationships are injured when relations with directors and with coworkers as the

¹¹⁰ Sevdâ, workshop on performance systems, 27.11.2011 *Ne olursa olsun ben geriliyorum o toplantıda. Ne olursa olsun o ‘yapamadım’ hissi oluşuyor! Arkadaşlarımı da hatırlamaya çalışıyorum toplantı öncesi sonrası konuşmalarımızı. Kimsede rahatlık yok. Tanıdığım insanlardan mı kaynaklı bilmiyorum. O görüşme sanki çalışanın kendini eksik bulacağı bir hale dönüşüyor. Geçen sefer şunu konuştuk : performans değerlendirmesi toplantısında gidicez maaşlarımız az dices . Ama oraya gidenlerin çoğu bunu diyemedi. Çünkü müdür bir şekilde onları her yönden eleştiriyor. Zaten görüşmelere doğru müdüre karşı daha bi müsamahakar olma, ne bilim birlikte yemeğe gittiği arkadaşlar konusunda biraz daha dikkatli olma..bu gibi şeyle rtezkiye zamanına yakın başlıyor.*

¹¹¹ Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor.”, p. 146.

ground for control become precisely what are evaluated in these meetings. Maurizio Lazzarato argued that the accumulation of capital has become “an accumulation of the very capacity to be social or to interact – a capacity that exists prior to and outside of capital” in post-fordism¹¹². The corporation aims to control the capacity to be social of the workers and the criteria of performance include their sociality in the workplace, which always exceeds the former because the affects can never be counted as such.

Keep it private!

There is a side effect of hiding your wage level. The wages are in general close to one another, there is not really big discrepancies between similar positions. But there is something that increases one’s distrust. You cannot even say to your best friend. It is considered ‘secret’ and it is inserted as a secret into the relations between close friends at work since one cannot be sure what happens when your wage is known – when it is known that you mentioned your wage.¹¹³

‘Privacy’ or ‘secrecy’ (*gizlilik*), the subtitle of the first workshop PEP ever organized, refers to the different aspects of work that are not supposed to be discussed publicly in the workplace, that need to remain private even outside the workplace: ‘unprofessional’ practices at the workplace (from mobbing to personal traits of the workers), wage levels, performance appraisal meetings and their ‘irrational’ criteria, job interviews and recruitment processes, workloads etc. The issue of what not to talk about and to whom not to talk at work constitutes an important aspect of different management systems in corporations. For example, a

¹¹² Ibid., p. 128.

¹¹³ Mert, workshop on privacy, 23.04.2011 *Maaş gizlemenin aslında şöyle bir tarafı da var. Maaşlar birbirine yakın genelde, gerçekten uçurum yok. Ama insanların güvensizliğini artıran birşey var. En yakın arkadaşına bile söyleyemiyor kişi. Çünkü bu bir sır gibi belirleniyor ve yakın arkadaşına söylediğin zaman onun söyleyip söylemeyeceğinden de emin olmadığı için arkadaşlar, dostlar arasına bile bir sır olarak giriyor, konuşulmuyor.*

common prohibition at the workplace is about talking publicly about wage levels. Employees are not supposed to talk about their wages among each other. On the one hand, it is in accordance with the conception of a competitive individual worker, on the other hand, worker's relation with the corporation acquires a 'private' character since a secret becomes constitutive of the very relation of employment. This resulting effect of management practices on the affective economy constitutes an important individualizing force for workers. Not mentioning wages, not talking about performance evaluation results, not mentioning pay raises or bonuses to your co-workers promote an individualized workplace culture. The information such these, belongs to the intimate space between the individual worker and his/her job, and cannot be the object of collegial exchanges – but it is known by the 'corporation' (bosses, directors, human resources employees etc.) and largely decided by it. Thus, the relationships between co-workers are always predicated upon something hidden, and everyone knows that it has to remain hidden. Some state that most co-workers know or guess each other's wages, which always becomes an important gossip topic during lunch breaks, especially in the weeks following pay raise and performance evaluation periods. The workers in the platform claim that the act of sharing these type of hidden information usually leads to some tension in the workplace. Yet, this moment of transgression, of sharing the wages, does not necessarily constitute relations of solidarity among workers against the management; it can also give rise to separate individual strategies for competing for compensation.

The issue of privacy that is discussed here can be considered as the information that needs to remain private between the individual worker and the corporation (usually represented by a worker's superior or a human relation employee). Rather than companies' strategic decisions that need to be hidden from

its competitors, I refer to those which are used to isolate workers in their relations with co-workers and to ensure competition. Sezen's 'career' shows clearly how the companies can make use of the decisions on the organizational structure in this manner. She was employed as an assistant expert in the charge-back department of a multinational bank¹¹⁴. After a consulting firm analyzed the organizational structure of the company, they decided to close the position of "director" (*yönetmen*) in several departments including charge-back. That meant for the workers in those departments that their career plans cannot include a promotion to the position of director. This created a gap between the 'assistant manager' and 'assistant expert' positions. This was two years after that she was hired and at that time they were five assistants in the department. A few years later, they heard about the opening of some director positions in different departments. They started to ask whether that can also be the case in their own department. The answer was that they should be patient and keep their hope. Sezen explained to me how this answer increased secretly the competition among the five assistants who could be promoted. After a while, Sezen became more and more 'the responsible' in the department in the face of the administration, namely of her assistant manager since she was willing to be promoted and 'getting things done': "Everyone is expert and when no one takes the responsibility, some works remain abandoned. I was usually the one who takes care of that kind of work. Any case it will create trouble for us if no one does it."¹¹⁵ Of course, this increased her responsibility and meant more workload for her. But the position of director was never re-opened; workers refer to these titles in the

¹¹⁴ Charge Back: The unit where the objections of costumers to the bills are taken into consideration.

¹¹⁵ Sezen, 16.12.2012. *Herkes yönetmen yardımcısı, kimse taşın altına elini sokmayınca iş ortada kalıyor. Gerçi hep taşın altına da ben sokuyodum elimi, iş ilerlesin, durmasın diye. Zaten durduğunda da bizim başımıza patlıyordu.*

organizational structure as ‘boxes’ (*kutucuk*) and Sezen told me how her desire to be promoted, which is also considered legitimate in the eyes of her immediate superiors, cannot be realized because of the lack of a small box – a technical and structural decision made by the top-managers of the bank. Besides the unrealized promotion, the competition among co-workers was also affected by the change in the distribution of responsibility. When she insisted on her demand, the final answer she received was “most likely, it will be decided towards the middle of the year, but we don’t promise, we cannot say that the ‘box’ will be opened but it will be opened with 70% probability.”¹¹⁶ She explained to me that all these conversations were private; she was the only one who heard the answers of human resources department via her assistant manager and she was supposed not to share them with her co-workers. Hence, this private information as the high probability of promotion kept her with an increased responsibility and workload for her last five years in the company. Increasing the competition among workers through this kind of provision of hidden information is a usual practice in workplaces and can take many different forms.

Şentürk, in this regard, argues that the desire of employees for promotion should always be analyzed together with the politics of the staff of corporations which can be used strategically in the competitive environment it aims to conserve. He gives the example of promotion decisions in the companies for the high rank professional positions: three people were separately and secretly informed about a likely promotion and then one of them was selected and the other two were fired.¹¹⁷ However, as I exemplified above, the hidden information given to the employees by

¹¹⁶ Sezen, 16.12.2012. *yıl ortasına doğru bu iş netleşecek dediler, ama söz veriyoruz olarak kabul etme, kesin kutu açılacak diyemeyiz, ama %70 açılacak.*

¹¹⁷ Şentürk, “İstanbul’da Şirketler Dünyasının Profesyonelleri (Professionals of the World of Corporations in Istanbul).”, p. 79.

the administration does not have to be about a big promotion in the higher ranks of the managerial hierarchy, it can also be a way to ensure the competition among low-level positions. Sezen worked harder for her last five years in the company with the hope that a new box will open, which stayed as secret and improbable information provided by the managers. In her last two years, Sezen searched for another job where she could have a position similar to the removed ‘box’. Then she found a new job in another international bank, again in the same department. This time they were three experts but their assistant manager told her that she would be ‘the responsible’. Although this was a very similar situation, the fact that her superior appointed her from the beginning as the responsible one was relieving for Sezen. But then she had problems with her co-workers due to this organizational structure:

There are two other employees with the same title like me, but I am responsible from them. This caused trouble for them: someone, a newcomer have the same title but she acts as the responsible. They had this title one month before my arrival and they have only one or two years of experience but anyway, they were not ok with it. When for example I ask them why some work was not done, they get a sour look on their faces. Then, it came out that our assistant manager did not inform them correctly, she did not tell them that I am hired as the responsible. She just told them that she was going to ask to me but that does not mean that I should guide them in order to manage the team – which she told me in the last interview.¹¹⁸

Besides the increased competition thanks to the presence of a ‘secret’ between co-workers, this kind of hidden information can also be a way to evaluate the worker, a technique to test her capability. As Şentürk also argues, this encourages the professional to be the ‘ideal personnel’ of the company¹¹⁹. Similarly, Sezen had to

¹¹⁸ Sezen, 16.12.2012. *Benle aynı title’a sahip iki kişi var, ben onlardan sorumluyum. Bu da sıkıntı yarattı tabii, dışardan biri geldi, aynı title’da ama onlardan sorumlu. Gerçi onlar da ben gelmeden 1 ay önce title almışlar. Tecrübeleri de 1-2 sene ama hazmediler gibi oldu. Ben mesela bu iş niye olmadı diye sorunca yüzleri buruşuyordu falan. Sonra konuşunca ortaya çıktı ki üstyöneticimiz onlara bilgi vermemiş benim sorumlu olduğuma dair, onların işine karıştığımı düşünmüşler. Sonra onlara ben tüm işi tek bir kişiden sormak istediğim için Sezen’i sorumlu kıldım demiş. Ama bunu benim yöneteceğim, yönlendireceğim şeklinde anlamamışlardı onlar.*

¹¹⁹ Şentürk, “İstanbul’da Şirketler Dünyasının Profesyonelleri (Professionals of the World of Corporations in Istanbul).”, p. 80.

deal with two employees that she is responsible from and who don't want to accept her as their responsible. Since in addition to the technical competences, one has to know how to deal with stress and handle the challenging context of team work as well as the leadership question in an ordinary professional work setting. In other words, she has to communicate in the most efficient way possible with other workers.

Melisa's experience, another worker in a flight company whom I quoted in the beginning of this chapter, reveals another aspect of this technique put in use through private information sharing:

In the interview, they told me that there was a new project, about which the company was fully informed and that I would be working in this. I was supposed to organize the trainings with the instructor personnel of the company. But once stated, I realized that the instructors of the company don't want to be part of this project, they told me that they would never participate. I was shocked... they were jumping in front of me, insulting, shouting... But I am like those kind of ambitious employees who like challenge; I was programmed to succeed! We can also say that Human Resources director had also encouraged me (*gaza getirmesi*). But there was clearly a lie here, no one was informed correctly about when the project was going to start and how it could be implemented. What I understood after having been hired was the opposite what they told me in the interviews. I was on my own in this project. There was one experienced instructor who was also busy with organizations and he took me for a threat to his promotion...¹²⁰

Here the information provided in the interviews was simply a lie according to Melisa. One can think that it is a conventional strategy to leave the newly hired worker with a difficult job. But the only effect of this conventional method is not pushing worker in a difficult working environment, it also gives the opportunity to

¹²⁰ Melisa, 27.12.2012. *Görüşme sırasında bana söylenen şuydu: belli bir proje olduğu, şirketin bundan tamamen haberdar olduğu ve benim gelir gelmez projeyle ilgileneneğim. Sen eğitimlerin organizasyonunu yapacaksın thy eğitmenleriyle dendi bana. Ama girdikten sonra baktım ki eğitmenler bunu istemiyorlar, biz asla gelmeyiz falan diyolar, küfür kıyamet.. ben böyle şok oldum tabii. Karşımda zıplıyorlar, küfür ediyorlar. Ben de biraz şeyimdir, challenge severim, dedim ki ben bunu yapıcım, bunu başarıcım! Biraz da ordaki ik müdürünün beni şeyiyle, teknik olarak gaza getirmesi diyebiliriz... ama burda bi yalan var aslında yani hiçkimsenin haberi yokmuş. Bunu anladım sonrasında, işe alımda söylenenin tam tersi bir durum. Bir de tek başımayım bu projede. İçerde eğitmen olan bir arkadaş var, o da beni tehdit olarak görüyor...*

the company of observing how she deals with it and whether she is suitable, ambitious enough for a more crucial position in the company – in this example, the challenge is to establish good relations with the instructors, convince them for the training projects of the company and more importantly to have a good communication with the only superior who is crucial in the performance evaluation.

These two cases are different forms in which the workers find themselves alone with the secret information. Since one is not authorized to share it with co-workers, it ensures a private space between the company and the individual worker. Accordingly, the sociality at the workplace, based on such a mediation, is considered to be manageable for the company – usually by its human resources departments – in the sense that the workers need to quietly accept what needs to remain hidden from their colleagues in order to be successful and promoted, to get the things done; or simply to do that in order to be an ideal and indispensable employee of the corporation.

Mobbing

In this way the issue of ‘what to share with whom’ at the workplace becomes a major source of anxiety for workers. On the one hand, the workers who participate to the meetings of the platform state the lack of trust they have towards their coworkers. They complain about the ‘white collar characteristics’ which encourage the revealing of one another’s failures, acting as if one were the actual owner of the business (*‘kraldan çok kralcı olmak’*). On the other hand, the relations with the director or the superior come into prominence when workers talk about their work conditions and the anxiety they feel at work. Regarding performance systems, especially the ones employed in operational jobs, workers emphasize that the relations with the director

becomes very important. Mert as an accountant in a research company claims that his performance depends on his friendly conversations with his boss:

I am an accountant. In this kind of operational jobs, there is not much criteria to evaluate performance. I mean billing and collection of revenues are much of standardized processes. I cannot put something from ‘myself’ to better collect money or write the bill. Then the performance becomes how close is our relations with the director. Your good grades heavily depend on your relation with the boss even if you don’t want to have any conversations with him/her. If you perform what you need to do, your performance is evaluated based on your chatting abilities! I have been experiencing this throughout my work life, you feel obliged to establish close relations with your director, your boss because of your job.¹²¹

The directors who are responsible to increase the profitability of the company and have the chance to be promoted based on their performance, are decisive on the workload of the workers they manage. Şentürk also indicates how the directors’ approach to their work determines the working conditions of the workers¹²². Workers refer to their managers as either good or bad. Good managers are the ones who care about the working hours, they are concerned and understanding regarding the personal problems of their team members, and helpful to improve themselves. But the bad managers are usually referred as the more ambitious people who love their work, always do overtime, schedule meetings in the evenings and don’t like workers who refuse to work overtime. Beyond the distinction of “good” and “bad/crazy” directors, the relations between the superior and the workers he manages point to a structural condition in the organization of the work and workplace in the

¹²¹ Mert, workshop on performance systems, 27.11.2011. *Ben muhasebeciyim. Bu tür operasyonel işlerde performansın ölçülebileceği çok kriter yok. Yani bugün fatura kestin onun tahsilatı gibi şeyler zaten normal iş süreçleridir. Bunun üzerine bu işi yapan adamın üzerine extra bir şey koyarak daha iyi tahsilat yapması gibi bir şey yok. 10 lirayı 15 lira olarak tahsil edemiyorsun. O zaman performans değerlendirmesi yöneticine yakınlığa dönüşüyor. Yöneticine ne kadar yakın veya yönetici açısından sıcak bir sohbet kurabiliyorsan - sen bu sohbetin içinde olmak istemesen bile... Onun sana performans olarak yaklaşımı, zaten sohbeti iyi zaten işi de yapıyor, o zaman yüzde on zammı haketti yaklaşımına dönüyor ki; ben bunu çalışma hayatına girdiğim zamandan beri yaşıyorum. İş gereği bir şekilde yakın ilişki kurmak zorunda kalıyorsun yöneticininle veya patronunla.*

¹²² Şentürk, “İstanbul’da Şirketler Dünyasının Profesyonelleri (Professionals of the World of Corporations in Istanbul).”, p. 81.

corporations. The management of the company gives the targets to be met and the director is encouraged to find out his own means of reaching them. Most of the time, the ways in which these means are applied are not questioned or interfered by the company as long as the work done by the department or the team is profitable enough. One worker in the workshop on anxiety described his director as follows:

Our director is one employee but she works as a team of five, she brings lots of new jobs to the company. This is the reason why the managers of the company accept her craziness. The part who sells the project decides the time interval in which that project will be done; but sometimes it wants only to sell without paying attention with how many people and in how much time that work can be done. That is what the corporation wants indeed. They think like “sell whenever you can, it will be done somehow – by working overtime”¹²³.

Many workers narrate their directors in the meetings as ‘being aggressive and constantly angry’.

My director uses as a slogan the following: “I cannot handle with my stress, I shout when I got angry, no one should take it personally”. Everyone seems to accept it. I don’t want to blame anyone but no one had ever reacted to this. She told us clearly, how she does not take employees, who are assigned work by her in different departments, as humans and that she has this attitude in order to make her job done prior to the others.¹²⁴

The fact that the job is stressful and the directors not only force workers to work more but they also work too much, are seen as the normalizing factors for such behaviors of the directors. Workers, as it can be seen from the quotations above, tell that they somehow accept the comportment of their superiors and try to find ways of coping with it. The human resources departments also encourage workers to endure as much as they can since the rewards can only be obtained in that way.

¹²³ Osman, workshop on anxiety, 02.05.2011. *Yönetici tek kişi ama 5 kişilik bir takım gibi çalışıyor, şirkete bir sürü iş getiriyor. Deli olmasının şirket tarafından kabul görmesinin nedenlerinden biri bu. Proje süresini projeyi satan kişi belirler ve işi satmak için bazen o işin kaç kişi ile ne kadar sürede yapılacağına bakmadan işi satmak ister. Ki şirket de bunu ister. “Satabildiğin anda sat, bir şekilde fazla mesai ile yapılır” diye düşünürler.*

¹²⁴ Şermin, workshop on anxiety, 02.05.2011. *Şöyle bir slogan geliştirmiş “ben stresimle baş edemiyorum, sinirlenince bağırırım, bunu kimse üstüne alınmasın”. Bunu herkese kabul ettirmiş. Kimseyi suçlamak istemiyorum ama kimse tavır almamış. Diğer departmanlarda işini yaptırdığı kişileri insan olarak görmeyip, işi önce yapılınsın diye bu tavrı benimsediğini açıkça söyledi.*

When I reacted and went to talk with human resources department about being offended, reprimanded, and humiliated by my director who was constantly yelling at me, they replied “you gave up too early, you ain’t seen nothing yet!”¹²⁵

While these examples of the ‘bad’ directors are interpreted as deviances from the norms of professionalism, workers who participated to the PEP meetings and with whom I did interviews claimed that these are conventional practices in corporations. The descriptions of ‘bad’ directors, who yell at workers, reprimand and humiliate them, are shared by many workers in the meetings. Bade interprets this director attitude as a ‘conscious tactic’:

There is big pressure exerted by your director in our company. I am currently experiencing a typical women director who is constantly having a ‘nervous breakdown’. I think that it is a tactic. She terrorizes all the office and everyone becomes a puppet inside. (*Herkes zaten mum gibi olmuş durumda içerde*). The door is closed and we are constantly on alert. And this is the approved attitude of the directors in the corporation.¹²⁶

In the platform meetings, workers agree that the ‘bad directors’ are the best ‘human resources’ of the corporations where ‘mobbing’ becomes inevitable. The issue of mobbing, which extends well beyond this thesis, includes a wide array of practices “from vicious bullying and overt scapegoating to more passive actions without a formal instigator such as social exclusion and isolation”¹²⁷.

Noelle J. Molé argues that mobbing, together with all the institutional apparatus around it, names a ‘psychic injury’ of workers. The latter is seen as stemming from “the intensely disordered social relations between workers, and

¹²⁵ Şermin, workshop on anxiety, 02.05.2011. *Azarlanmalar, yüksek sesle bağırılmalar, rencide etmeler gibi davranışlara itiraz ettiğimde insan kaynakları bana ‘çok erken pes ettin, daha ne yaşadın ki’ dedi*

¹²⁶ Bade, 25.05.2013. *Yöneticiden büyük baskı yiyorsun. Mesela şu an sinir krizindeki kadın yönetici tipini yaşıyorum. Bunun artık bir taktik olduğunu düşünüyorum. Sürekli ortamı terörize ediyor ve mum gibi oluyorsun. Herkes zaten mum gibi olmuş durumda içerde. Kapı kapalı ve sürekli teyakkuz halindeyiz. Genelde de makbul olan tavır bu şirkette.*

¹²⁷ Molé, “Existential Damages: The Injury of Precarity Goes to Court.”

between workers and employers” rather than directly from the labor policies and practices inducing a precarious labor regime¹²⁸. According to Mole, naming mobbing and awarding ‘existential damage’ of workers through judicial regulations displaces the locus of agency from the institutionalization of precarious labor regime onto social relations. She states that while it has several historical antecedents, the reason why mobbing became an official category and a legal challenge to the precarious labor regime during late 1990s and 2000s in Italy “stands as a powerful reminder that late capitalism harnesses and violates souls in unprecedented ways”¹²⁹. The fact that mobbing is named legally as ‘existential injury’ in Italy also reveals the constitutive paradox of post-Fordism: intensification of workers’ affective investments in their labor and their simultaneous deprivation of solidarity. Similar to Gregg’s account of intimacy, Mole’s analysis emphasizes this paradox as the defining feature of post-Fordism. Mobbing in this regard is but one affective trademark of post-Fordism since the affective investments of workers in their labor fuels an ‘existential damage’, an ‘ineffable loss’ which are named mobbing and normalized in the precarious labor regime which undermines the class solidarity¹³⁰.

Following Molé’s analysis of mobbing, I stress that the above narratives of ‘bad director’, which can be legally challenged in specific ways under the name of mobbing, also reveal the displacement of labor control onto sociality at work. Workers in PEP state that it is almost impossible to speak about these practices of humiliation outside the workplace as university graduate professionals. The intimate ‘corporate culture’ machine, through the privacy of the work experience, sustains

¹²⁸ Ibid., p.27-28

¹²⁹ Ibid., p.27

¹³⁰ Noelle J. Molé, “Hauntings of Solidarity in Post-Fordist Italy,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 85, no. 2 (2012), pp. 371–96.

cooperation and teamwork in the small units of the corporation. And the probable injury resulting from the social relations in corporations becomes an ‘existential’ one; a damage to the intimacy as constitutive of the work relation, a damage to the ‘dignity’ of oneself.

Fear and Firing

Murat Özveri, a lawyer and expert on labor law, stated in a conference on the effects of the recent change of unions law that his white collar clients who are fired and want to sue a case, usually express their feelings of ‘betrayal’¹³¹. As I explained in the beginning of this chapter, white-collar workers are expected to have an intimate relation with the job they perform. Their employability is always considered as a personal success of being good at one’s job through making use of one’s personality. Relatedly, in a case of firing, the worker realizes that all the efforts she makes to be better at the job, to satisfy the requirements of the corporation do not result in the promised rewards. The ‘legendary’ firing practices that circulate among white-collars reveal an important aspect of the precarity, both as an employment regime and as an affective structure. On the one hand, they make obvious the job insecurity in the labor market by the easiness and the speed of being fired. On the other hand, and maybe more importantly, they point to another technique in the apparatus of affective control which I have been trying to illuminate to some extent throughout this chapter. The sophisticatedly planned firing settings show the increasingly transitory character of labor for the corporation and the latter’s intensified demands even in the firing moment.

¹³¹ 08.12.2014, organized by The Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects in Taksim, Istanbul.

Similar to the relations with co-workers and superiors where naming ‘mobbing’ emerges as a way to protect oneself from structural damages of the social relations at work; firing settings also involve various ways to compromise between corporations and individual workers. Negotiating with workers by suggesting a packet of payment in return for their resignation is one common means that is used. And to be sure, the amounts paid in such cases are usually less than those of legal obligations in the name of compensation (*tazminat*). To sign a ‘compromise agreement’ (*ikale sözleşmesi*) – which can be canceled by the court later– is a widespread corporate strategy for ‘managed exits’¹³², also encouraged by the time and cost of the litigation. Threatening workers by some personal records which could affect one’s future employability (“If we fire you, it will be entered to your records and you will not be able to find a job.”) or signing a legally invalid agreement to claiming that the worker will not go to the court are some other corporate practices in this regard.

The reason that I focus on the firing mise-en-scenes is not look for the ‘real’ reasons of firing or to argue that they are simply ideologically distorted forms of a precarious neoliberal labor policy. It is not a secret that performance evaluation grades become pretexts in many occasions for corporations to fire workers; although, especially for large-scale lay-offs (and also most of the time for individual cases which go to court), individual performance results are not legally accepted as ‘valid causes’ (*haklı neden*). Similarly ‘downsizing’, especially in times of crisis, is well known to all workers as a reason to become unemployed. But what I want to focus on this section on firing is the way in which some firing stories circulate among

¹³² Phil Taylor, Performance Management and the New Workplace Tyranny. Executive Summary, A Report for the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC). <http://www.stuc.org.uk/files/Document%20download/Workplace%20tyranny/STUC%20Performance%20Management%20Executive%20Summary%20final.pdf> (accessed on 29 January 2013)

workers in the organization meetings; to look for the affects that stick to them and keep alive a feeling of ‘dignity loss’, of an ‘existential damage’ for the educated middle class. Different firing stories circulate among circles of organized white-collar workers and induce the fear of not just losing the job but also losing one’s dignity. Hence, an analysis of the circulation of these firing mise-en-scenes, together with the ways in which workers experience their firing, points to an important aspect of the middle class labor organization among white collars: what is shared and mobilized by the organizations is the not the fact of being fired per se, but the ways in which this firing process becomes humiliating for individual workers. Similar to the job interviews which last for months with several tests, firing interviews are also sophisticatedly planned. And what is left to the workers is not only the fact of being fired but also damaged morally: finding oneself in a humiliating position in front of (ex-)coworkers and superiors.

Melisa worked as the director assistant in a marketing department of a food company. After her director changed, she faced with a ‘capricious’ new director who asked her to plan interviews for “a comprehensive restructuring”:

One day she gave me the quest of organizing one-to-one meetings with those who were going to be fired. People were very stressed, asking who is leaving, it was incredibly nervous. She made me send emails for the all day, planning like at 9 a.m. Fatih, at 10a.m. Melisa, at 11a.m. someone else ... These were like performance appraisal meetings; she made me design the day, send emails like *Azrail* (the angel of death). Then around 4.55 p.m. she told me that she also wanted to have a meeting with me. ‘As you know, we wanted to cut off many people’s relation with the company. Yes, I know.’ But I was not expecting at all, the job was already very light compared to my previous experiences, I have very good relations with people, we give everything to this lady with a high ego (*egosu yüksek*), so I think that everything is perfect. Then at 4.55p.m. she told me that I was one of those who were leaving. I was shocked, it was really a very big shock for me. I mean I am giving what feeds her, I never say no, since she wants to feel herself like God, I mean had really made myself submissive... I was shocked, I could not say something.¹³³

¹³³ Melisa, 27.11.2012. *Bana birgün işten çıkartılacaklarla ilgili one-to-one meetingler düzenleme görevini verdi. İnsanlar resmen kim gidecek diye kendilerini yiyolar, inanılmaz bir gerginlik. Bütün*

Melisa was shocked and felt humiliated since her efforts to play the ideal employee, by even planning the firing interviews in the most efficient way, resulted in her own dismissal. She looked for a ‘personal failure’ which prevented her from being employable but the fact of being fired at the time when she expected an appreciation led her to a paralyzing situation. Ozan who works in a call center department of a bank told a similar story in the workshop on performance systems:

A recently married friend was promoted to a new unit. She was working for a long time. They said: “today there will be some friends who are going to exit, could you rent a few shuttles?” She rent, when she told she did, they replied okey, you also take the shuttle and go with them. There was no sign before. They only told her that if she does not sue a case – I think she could get like 7 wage worth money as compensation in that case – we will pay you 4 wages.¹³⁴

Giving the news of being fired to a worker who instead was expecting an appreciation is one form of control over the affective intensity of losing one’s job. It humiliates worker’s efforts. The loss becomes intimate through this humiliation since workers’ subjective investments are debased. The following reaction of Elif to the story told by Ozan shows how the degree of humiliation becomes the ground on which such stories circulate and constitute a ‘white-collar worker’ political subjectivity in the platform: “This more humiliating than this common story of

gün bana mail attırdı, 9da Fatih, 10da Melisa, 11de falanca.... Bunlar böyle performans görüşmesi gibiydi, bütün günü bana dizayn ettirdi, herkese azrail gibi mail attırdı. Sonra saat tam 5e 5 kala Melisa seninle de görüşmek istiyorum dedi. Biliyorsun bir sürü insanın burayla ilişkisinin kesilmesini istedik. Evet biliyorum. Ama ben hiç beklemiyorum, zaten iş benim normalde yaptığımdan çok daha az yüklü, çok iyi geçiniyorum insanlarla, bu egosu yüksek hatuna da her istediğini veriyoruz, herşey mükemmel diye düşünüyorum ben yani. Saat 5e5 kala bana dedi ki o gidenlerin arasında sen de varsın. Şok oldum, baya büyük bi şok oldu bana. Yani ne varsa beslicecek veriyorum, hayır demiyorum, kendini allah gibi hissetmek istiyo madem biz de yapalım, kendimi baya koyunlaştırmışım yani. ... Şok oldum hiçbirşey diyemedim.

¹³⁴ Ozan, worksop on performance, 03.11.2011. *Yeni evlenen bi arkadaş, bi birime terfi etmişti. Uzun süredir de çalışıyordu. Dediler ki: ‘bugün işten çıkacak arkadaşlar olacak, onları servisle yollayamayacağız, bikaç tane araç kiralar mısın?’ Birkaç araç kiraladı, kiraladım diye geldiğinde demişler ki tamam, sen de bin onlarla gidiyorsun. Hani hiç önceden hiçbirşey yok. Şunu sunuyolar sadece, eğer bizi dava etmezsen -dava ettiğinde sanırım 7 maaş gibi bişey kazanabiliyomuş- sana 4 maaş vericez.*

swiping your card and realizing at the moment it doesn't work that you are fired; more humiliating, really intrigue!”¹³⁵

Making firing interviews on the weekends by calling workers to ‘important and secret meeting’ or bringing ambulance in front of the workplace due to the expectation of extreme reactions by workers can become parts of different settings which encourage workers to experience the job loss more deeply. And simultaneously these settings scare those who are still working; those who stay become more stressed each time in order not to lose such an important job. Firing interviews are usually held towards the end of working hours (or just before the lunch break), so that the other workers see their disappointed ex-coworker but they do not have time to chat with him/her the details in the workplace. In some cases the computer of the worker can be shut down from the central while the decision is being communicated to her. Two workers that I met in the meetings of the platform told me that they had their computers formatted, all the documents and e-mails erased during the interview where they learned that they were fired. Melisa told me how she attempted to oppose this privacy of firing. She did not accept to leave the workplace quietly at the end of the day she received the news and the next day when she came to take her personal stuff, she tried to communicate with her (ex-)coworkers.

We are in a room, someone comes, another goes, constantly threats etc. I was in the workplace, it was like 5p.m., everyone was leaving, so nobody could see... I told that I was going to pack my things up the next day, I wanted to upset the apple-cart. I went the next day, I normally want to see my friends, we had some friendships, I want to say goodbye. When I go next to them, they had immediately a call, saying ‘told her to come downstairs’. People are

¹³⁵ Elif, workshop on performance, 03.11.2011. *Bu gidip kartını okutuyosun ve okumuyo ya, o anda anlıyosun işten çıktığını; ondan daha aşağılık, resmen entrika!*

afraid. Or while I am talking with my friend, she comes next to me and says ‘it is very wrong that you are still here’¹³⁶.

As she explains, the control mechanisms over the social relations at the workplace make her last visit more dangerous for her ex-coworkers; her presence as the fired worker became scary.

These firing settings should be taken into consideration within a context of constant job search for a secure retirement – which can only be reached by being employable throughout all the periods of employment, underemployment and unemployment in workers’ lives or the trajectory of the relation between capital and labor power. Keeping an updated CV in the databases, checking ‘job opportunities’ and going to job interviews, sometimes secretly, are some basic requirements of keeping oneself employable in the competitive labor market of white-collars, of feeling secure about employment till retirement where the old fantasy of the middle class professional employee, ‘a promising career in one corporation’, is no longer held. Acts of firing, involve not only the ‘exceptional but systemic rules’ of capitalism and the (neoliberal) labor market or capitalism’s ‘existential damage’ to individuals in humiliating and indignifying forms; but also they involve the subjectivity of workers in particular ways through expecting a ‘shock’ and fear. The unexpected, sudden intervention to one’s intimate relation with his/her labor involves particular affective effects to be managed.

Here, it is important to remember that what made possible the circulation of these stories of ‘firing settings’ as a means of organization among white-collars, was

¹³⁶ Melisa, 27.12.2012. *İşte bir odadayız, biri geliyor biri çıkıyor, sürekli böyle tehditler falan. Çalıştığım yerdeyim, akşam saat 5 civarı, herkes ofisten çıkarken, kimse görmezken. Ben yarın eşyalarımı toplayacağım dedim, onların planlarını da bozmak istedim. Ertesi gün gittiğimde arkadaşlarımı görmek istiyorum tabii, o kadar arkadaşlıklar kurulmuş, veda etmek istiyorum. Yanlarına gittiğimde hemen telefon geliyor, söyleyin aşağı gelsin diye. İnsanlar da korkuyor. Ya da bir arkadaşım ile konuşuyorum, geliyor yanıma senin burda olman çok yanlış falan diyo..*

the affective impact accumulated by the experience of workers who learned their dismissal in the entering their plazas (when their cards failed to open the toll gates) or from cell phone messages¹³⁷. Especially the massive lay-outs in the aftermath of 2001 and 2008 crises made public the insecure employment for a wide variety of managerial jobs and gave way to the articulation of particular strong feelings together with the proliferation of some collective actions organized against job insecurity in ‘plaza regions’.

Throughout this chapter, I have outlined how the sociality and intimacy at work is attempted to be controlled by the management practices in corporations. I focused on the narratives, which circulate in the *Plaza Eylem Platformu* and depicted some affective components of today’s precarious labor regime in professional corporations in Istanbul. I argued that the workers are expected to have an intimate relationship with the job they perform and this expectation is institutionalized through the use of the human resources management techniques and that the corporation keeps its presence in the collegial relations by inducing confidentiality, ensuring competition and control of the sociality at workplace. Normalized mobbing practices, together with the sophisticatedly designed, ordinary firing procedures, show some instances where the affective components of the control over the sociality at work become mediated in particular as feelings of anxiety, inadequacy, humiliation and fear. This picture that I encountered in my field study among the *white-collars* and their organizations in Istanbul is one channel opened through the affective flows of labor and overdetermined social relations in and around corporations (‘corporate

¹³⁷ The latest example was at Turkish Airlines which fired 305 workers by sending text messages in 2012.

machines’). In the next chapter, I will elaborate on the particularity of the platform’s channeling these affective flows. Similar to the human resources practices, which mediate worker’s attachments to have a good job, to become successful at one’s job, to perform the ideal employee as I elaborated upon above; *Plaza Eylem Platformu* (together with the other small organizations) constitutes another space of modulation of the affective economy of laboring which can never be fully controlled by corporate mechanisms. Related to the intimacy discussed in this chapter, I will discuss how workers aim to establish an alternative relationship of collegiality in the intimate space of the platform: how does the attachment to a fantasy of white collar workers who do not have to be competitors, but need to control the sociality at work without the mediation of the corporation for solidarity become the fuel for organization? The paradoxes of organized workers’ transgression of the corporate rules – either by making public various control mechanisms or by overcoming corporate mediations – will be the locus of my analysis in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

TRANSGRESSION AND POLITICAL SUBJECTIVITY

Introduction

In this chapter, I will analyze how the platform attempts to constitute an autonomous space among the workers who aim to construct relations of solidarity against the sociality they have in corporations. I argue that the platform constitutes a new channel in the affective economy of laboring where workers publicize the hidden working conditions and share their intimate relations to laboring, mediated by the human resources techniques.

Plaza actions and formation of the platform

We, as the Plaza Action Platform, believe that the white collar workers have the potential to change their own working conditions. We take our power from the famous *angoisse* that we feel every Monday, from our anxieties of performance, from the selling targets that are impossible to reach, from mobbing practices applied when necessary, from career lies, from promised but never realized wage increases, from inhumane practices such as pulling out our chair when the sale cannot be realized and oblige us to work for six hours standing. We don't have any chance except to unite and struggle together. Every resignation, every new job relieves us only temporarily. Let's change not the corporation in which we are employed but the conditions under which we work.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Biz plaza eylem platformu olarak en başından beri beyaz yakalıların içinde bulunduğu bu kötü koşulları değiştirme potansiyelinin olduğuna inanıyoruz. Gücümüzü, her pazartesi sabahları içimizi burkan o meşhur sıkıntıdan, performans kaygılarından, hiçbir zaman tutması mümkün olmayan satış hedeflerinden, yeri geldiğinde uygulanan mobbingten, kariyer yalanlarından, söz verilip de hiç zaman gerçekleşmeyen maaş zamlarından, satış yapmadı diye çalışanın altından sandelye çeken ve 6 saat ayakta kalmaya mecbur bırakan insanlık dışı uygulamalardan alıyoruz. Bir araya gelip mücadele etmekten başka çaremiz yok artık. Her yazdığımız istifa, her değiştirdiğimiz iş bizi geçici olarak rahatlatıyor. Biz artık diyoruz ki; çalıştığımız şirketi değil içinde bulunduğumuz koşulları değiştirelim (www.plazaeylem.org)

As I described before, *Plaza Eylem Platfomu* (PEP) is a ‘white collar worker’ organization gathering employees from a variety of companies; mostly banking, insurance, research, and telecommunication sectors. After the ‘Plaza Actions’ of weekly gatherings during the lunchtime on Wednesdays for eight weeks, the platform was initially formed by a group of employees who stated that they were ‘conscious’ of the leverages of being unionized against bosses. However, in their workplaces, either there was no union which they could join or there existed unions but were controlled by the employers. Besides these constraints on unionization, PEP participants also emphasized the inadequacy of unions in responding to the precarious nature of their work, and how unions were seen as ‘ideological’ or ‘political’ by other workers who defined themselves as ‘professional employees’ or by various titles of management – such as ‘executive’, ‘manager’, ‘assistant manager’, ‘expert’, ‘junior’ etc. – and kept away from political struggles. Hence, the initiators thought that the platform, as an organization refusing to go by the conventional union structure, could form an alternative ground for the white-collar workers who were discontent with their work and work conditions, and wanted to be organized. Since 2009, the plaza employees, as they call themselves, from a wide variety of companies meet every week in order to create such an organization of solidarity, and to explain to the white collar workers that their seemingly personal problems refer to the structural problems that every worker faces.

Members of the platform aim to reveal the invasion of their lives by the corporations and try to find ways to cope with it. As evident in the last sentence of the above quote, they attack the white-collar strategy of postponement such as ‘finding a better job’ or ‘wait until retirement’ by substituting ‘an escape from work’ with a participation in the platform in order to establish relations of solidarity among co-

workers. In the beginning of summer 2011, the platform issued a flyer, which include the legal arrangements on leave of absence under the banner of ‘PEP Turizm’, identifying the platform with a tourism agency. In January 2013, during the discussions regarding the change in the labor law of heavily restricting the right of severance pay, they issued a booklet, which identified the platform with a bank, and called white-collars not to give up their existing rights for severance pay¹³⁹. These flyers revealed the discursive move by the participants of defining the platform in the very of the space of the conventional institutions of the middle class life in Turkey. The life of workers outside work, conceived as the space of postponement within the temporality of work, is brought in relation with the space of work where workers cannot exercise their rights which they are even sometimes not aware of. Though the platform aims to inform workers about their legal rights in many ways¹⁴⁰, I will focus on the very practice of publicizing what is excluded from the managerial discourse.

In the previous chapter, I focused on the various technologies in corporations that attempt to manage the affective economy of laboring by codifying the excess created by living labor in an intimate narrative of productivity. The fact that workers in big corporations assent to various practices such as overtime and flexible working hours, mobbing, ‘managed exists’ remain hidden in every individual workplace. An important aim of the platform is to create a public where they reveal this disavowed aspect of the corporations. To this end, workers use the means of social media (such as news and links shared from Twitter and Facebook), distribute flyers, newsletters, and give interviews to radios, newspapers and magazines. They organize different activities where they come together, share experiences, discuss the underside of the

¹³⁹ See Appendix for the flyers.

¹⁴⁰ They organized several workshops on the Labor Act together with the lawyers. Also the newsletter and the website always include a corner on Labor Law.

corporations, articulate their sufferings which are usually seen as weakness in the corporation. As I explained in the previous chapter, the machinic production of the Human Resources Management codify the ‘personal’ feelings in terms of performance and productivity through evaluation of the worker’s inner self and his/her intimate commitment to the job in his/her interaction with co-workers. What escapes from this coding due to the immeasurability of the affect, the uncountable (surplus-)jouissance produced in the very sociality that sustains the corporation, also fuels the space through which the platform claims to construct relations of solidarity among the workers from different companies¹⁴¹. In other words, workers try to formulate different ways to resist the management practices through sharing the narratives of work on this underside of the corporate mechanisms; and the formation of the platform (or the self-organization of the workers) follows the flows in the affective economy of laboring.

Melissa Gregg argues that “...collegial relations are less a matter of striving for genuine communication or attachment as they are maintaining a sense of ambivalent and polite detachment given the uncertainties of the employment landscape.”¹⁴² She relies on Alan Liu’s work on knowledge workers where he equates ‘corporate’ with ‘user-friendliness’ and emphasizes the temporality of precarious employment conditions that lead to transitory socialities, where the collegial relations rests on simply being ‘user-friendly’ to each other. The self-

¹⁴¹ Among the participants of the platform, workers are mostly employed in ‘operational’ office jobs or at lower level managerial positions in different corporations. Although there exists many different hierarchical structures with many titles in different companies, there is a clear distinction for the PEP participants between the positions of directors, managers or supervisors (which are usually referred to as bosses) and lower level positions. But a significant amount of the workers have somehow interactions with different companies staff, in the form of corporate costumers from insurance seekers to auditors or researchers. Besides co-workers in the same company also interact with each other as separate departments in positions of buying and selling.

¹⁴² Gregg, “On Friday Night Drinks: Workplace Affects in the Age of the Cubicle.” p. 265.

organization of white collars in Istanbul relies on the constitution of an alternative collegiality through revealing this superficiality in the workplace imbued with secrets. Rather than keeping secrets in an intimate relationship with work – which can only be known by capital– workers are invited to keep secrets between themselves to be united around and constitute their political subjectivities against capital.

‘Experience sharing’ as an organizational glue

Gregg analyses the website called *PassAgg Notes* as an important means for white-collars to express anonymously their experiences at work. She argues that this kind of online platform become “a means to escape the alienation of the office”¹⁴³. For Gregg, such websites can also give important clues about the construction of the white-collar ‘cool’ subjects: “the site gives voice to the exacerbation felt by many ordinary office workers in information jobs seeking to distinguish their own professionalism, competence and ‘cool’ from the amateurism, irrationality and petty obsessions of co-workers.”¹⁴⁴ Humor and being snarky become ‘main currencies’ in the online communication, as it is usually the case in the office sociality according to Gregg. In Turkey, the online communication means that I came across are usually sector-specific news sites where people can also send comments, and some websites which are founded to gather information about the working conditions in corporations. *Firma Faresi* (Firm Rat - firmafaresi.com) started to publicize workers’ experiences from different corporations in May 2010. But in October 2012, the website was closed down by its founder due to numerous pressures and threats from

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 253.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 256.

corporations, and several banning decisions from courts¹⁴⁵. Most of the posts were about the working conditions in particular companies, and people did not have to give their names to write in the forums. People were sharing job interviews, wage levels, experiences from meetings or different practices, e-mail records between workers and managers etc. So the main aim was providing information to those who were in search of a job or about to change his/her job but who were not aware of the conditions inside. A few friends, who founded the website, were fired during the crisis of 2008 and then they realized that it was almost impossible to learn about the ‘real’ conditions in the corporations before accepting a job offer. Similarly, ‘mimarazzi.com’ was another website for architects who were employed by in numerous big or little building companies in Turkey. This website managed to stay open for less than one year due to the same problems. *The Association of Call Center Employees* (ÇMÇ) launched a similar website in 2012 under the name of ÇMÇ Leaks. They prepared standardized questionnaires about call centers and have been

¹⁴⁵ An excerpt from the announcement about the decision that one of the founders posted on the website which does not function anymore: “This platform, in which employees share freely their emotions and opinions within the limits of criticism, without any commercial purpose, has its contents created by its users and supports the freedom of expression. ... Because of some companies’ (which present themselves to the public as ‘corporate’/‘professional’) threads, pressures, slanders and defamations that are far from reason, logic, and conscience, this job cannot continue today. These firms or their representatives who could not get what they wanted by threatening, are unfairly using the lacks in the information technology law. Information that you can easily find after a Google search becoming denouncement of a commercial secret; the legal entities get harmed from statements like ‘the products are of good quality’ requesting material and moral compensations... I am sufficiently damaged from all these which cause to closing the website for months” (*Çalışanların eleştirisi sınırları içerisinde duygu ve düşüncelerini serbestçe paylaştığı, hiçbir ticari amaç gütmeyen, içeriği ziyaretçileri tarafından oluşturulan bu platform ifade özgürlüğünü savunmaktadır. Çalışma hayatına ayna tutmak amacıyla oluşturulan bu platform da asla KÜFÜR ve HAKARETE izin vermedim, anonim bir platform olduğu için herkese eşit söz ve cevap hakkı tanıdım. Kendilerini kurumsal olarak kamuoyuna tanıtan bazı firmaların akla, mantığa ve vicdana sığmayan tehdit, baskı, iftira ve karalamaları yüzünden bu iş yürütülemeyecek hale gelmiştir. Tehdit, baskı ile istediğini alamayan bu firmalar ya da temsilcileri bilişim hukukunda ki boşlukları ve adaleti sağlayacak sistemlerin bilgi eksikliğini kullanarak haksızlık yapmaktadır. Google da arattığınızda rahatça bulabileceğiniz bilgiler için ticari sır ifşasından, ürünleri kaliteli değil sözünden tüzel kişiliği inanılmaz zarar gören firmaların manevi ve maddi tazminatından tutun da benimle yazışıp sonrasında hasımsız olarak sitenin aylardır kapatılması gibi durumlardan yeterince zarar gördüm.*) <https://www.facebook.com/firmafaresi> (accessed on 12.10.2012)

publicizing them for different centers from which they have members¹⁴⁶. Given the restrictions exemplified by the situation of the above-mentioned sites, there is not an interactive site at present that one can identify as a virtual encounter space for white-collars. However, as I mentioned in the first chapter, in various websites the ‘plaza language and literature’ became a widespread entry. My focus in this chapter will be the regular encounters of workers in the formation of the platform and I will consider the latter as a new channel for the affective economy of laboring outside the corporations.

Workers in PEP don’t use questionnaires or online forums where other workers can anonymously contribute. They aim to publicize the real conditions of work for white-collars, the underside of corporations through coming together and reflecting collectively on their working experiences in different corporations. While breakfast or theatre organizations make possible different encounters, the workshops the platform calls ‘experience sharing’ allow for the gathering workers where they talk about a specific topic which is usually decided by the discussions held in previous meetings and activities of the platform. The format of the workshops was designed after a search of the workers for a way to articulate their ‘intimate’ work experiences that are supposed to remain secret. One worker who came to one of the workshops explained this search as follows:

... I realized that I pushed through the people in the street. Obviously, I was taking it out on someone. Because neither your family nor your friends can understand when you share, everyone does not have the same experience. I

¹⁴⁶ An informative form on the conditions in a call center is filled and posted by members of Call Center Employees (ÇMÇ) on their website under the title of ÇMÇleaks. <http://www.gercegecagrimerkezi.org/2013/08/plus-telekom-izmir-lokasyonu-calisma-kosullari/> (accessed on 02.09.2013); <http://www.gercegecagrimerkezi.org/2013/07/cmc-erzurum-cagri-merkezi-calisma-kosullari/> (accessed on 02.09.2013)

could not share this with someone. That is why I ran to this meeting when I heard it.¹⁴⁷

In March 2011, a group of white-collar workers in the platform decided to organize ‘group therapy’ sessions with the help of the Association of Psychologists for Social Solidarity¹⁴⁸. The reason was the fact that the workers who joined the platform always mentioned their loneliness in the workplace, faced with the management practices of managers, HR or co-workers. Regular meetings of the platform started with a collective experience sharing session; when someone began by expressing an everyday problem s/he faced in the workplace, be it a discussion with the director or a gossip about lay-outs, it was followed by another one explaining a similar experience and so on¹⁴⁹. After two sessions of therapy, workers decided to do workshops open to everyone, since they realized that the act of publicizing such hidden aspects, is not only an attempt of making them visible by putting them to public scrutiny but also an important need of the workers. This act of transgressing the moral, institutional and corporate¹⁵⁰ codes of corporations lies at the heart of the intimate relation with work.

¹⁴⁷ workshop on anxiety, 02.05.2011 ... *yolda yürürken birine omuz attığımı fark ettim. Resmen sınırimi bir yerden çıkarttım. Çünkü ne aileden ne arkadaşlarından biri ile paylaştan anlıyorlar, herkes aynı şeyi yaşamayabiliyor. Bir türlü ben bunu kimseyle paylaşamadım. O yüzden bu toplantıyı duyunca koşarak geldim.*

¹⁴⁸ Association of Psychologists for Social Solidarity (*Toplumsal Dayanışma için Psikologlar Derneği* - TODAP). See, www.eleps.info and www.todap.org

¹⁴⁹ When the platform’s regular weekly meetings started to have 25-30 people in spring 2011 and even increased to 50s in the summer, an important part of the meetings was these sessions. When the platform started to have more conventional meetings in the sense of only discussing what action to participate or support, where the most recent worker mobilizations were taking place or what the recent legislative actions were taken by the government, the participation sharply declined for a while in spring 2012.

¹⁵⁰ The Turkish word ‘kurumsallık’ which literally means ‘institutional’ is mostly used to express the corporate working environment in terms of referring to a ‘professional corporation’. This is the reason why I employ the adjectives ‘institutional’ and ‘corporate’ together.

In April 23, 2011 the first workshop was organized about ‘privacy’; a theme they decided upon during a breakfast organization after realizing they need to talk about what they cannot or should not talk in the workplace, either with managers or co-workers who are expected to be competitors. This workshop initiated the circulation of stories that are supposed to stay intimate, hidden, and not visible outside the corporations, and also usually not communicated inside them. The participants realized that the need to talk about the ‘real’ working conditions concealed by the fancy buildings and supposed-to-be good jobs could become an important way to establish new social bonds among workers. They continued to organize these workshops until the Gezi Uprising of May 2013¹⁵¹, after which forums organized by ‘white-collar solidarity’¹⁵² replaced the workshops.

During the workshops, workers narrate their work experiences about the decided topic. All the discussions are taped and then shared among the participants for transcription. A second meeting is done to discuss the transcribed text, to decide on the highlights and the main points to be emphasized in the report which will be circulated among white-collar workers. Then a few people write a report on the workshop; it is uploaded on the website and also printed as a pamphlet. So on the one hand, the platform performs a collective research and it provides informative materials for other workers. On the other hand, the workshops themselves constitute the most important organization method for the platform. During these workshops,

¹⁵¹ The next three workshop themes were ‘anxiety’, ‘performance enforcement’ and ‘job interviews’. After these four that I attended during my fieldwork, the platform organized two more workshops, one on ‘banking and insurance employees’ and the other on ‘discrimination in the workplace’ in 2013.

¹⁵² Beyazyaka Dayanışması: A recent network of white-collars that was formed in park forums after Gezi Uprising. The participants are mostly white-collars who met during the protests and many from organizations like PEP, BİÇDA and ÇMÇ.

workers narrate their work experiences. Sharing what is supposed to remain private enables an intervention of the platform to the intimate relation with work mediated by corporation. In other words, the platform mediates the supposedly intimate relation of the workers to their jobs and emerges as an important space in the constitution of the workers' subjectivity.

In the previous chapter, I analyzed human resources management techniques in corporations which, although increasingly encouraging team work, function through defining or modulating workers' intimate relation to work, a special and private relationship to the corporation and, more importantly, to one's 'productivity'.

Deploying various information and communication technologies, together with managerial techniques over sociality, especially in the interactions with the bosses (be it directors or managers), HR professionals and co-workers involve in the corporate management of mediating affects and emotions. However the relation of workers to corporate management technologies cannot be seen as a form of simple subjection, as a mere 'internalization' of the corporate ideals. I already emphasized in the previous chapter that these technologies attempt to capture an ambiguous, unstable affective economy. Once the subjective attachments to corporate ideology and to the functioning of corporations are also taken into account - that is, the affective economy of laboring in corporations - libidinal flows necessary for corporate functioning become the focus of analysis as the source of multiplicity of affects and subjectivity formation processes. Following the same line of thought, in this chapter, my aim is to analyze how this affective economy of laboring is channeled outside workplace, in the platform meetings; and what kind of political subjectivity is constructed in the process of self-organization of white-collars. In other words, this chapter deals with the question of how the affective economy of

laboring is traced beyond the workplace, in interactions with distant co-workers in the space of the platform.

Affect and Political Subjectivity

There is a growing literature in Critical Management Studies, focusing on the organizational and institutional aspects of social life in corporations, which relies on Lacanian psychoanalytical insights to illuminate the formation of worker subjectivities in workplaces where different managerial mechanisms are enacted. According to Lacanian psychoanalysis, what keeps ideology functioning are not conscious, coherent subjects, fully identifying with an ideal self-image. Rather, what sustains the socio-symbolic order is the very impossibility of fullness itself. In the context of ‘corporate culture’ (*‘kurum kültürü’*), human resources mechanisms are taken to occupy such a position of defining and implementing a socio-symbolic order, providing an ideal self-image for employees through skill assessments, and producing a knowledge about the competences of a person’s character¹⁵³. However, a look into the everyday life in the workplaces, and analyzing how individual workers experience and relate to their work, entails more than the ideal image that is pictured by human resources practices, and rather points towards complicated strategies deployed by workers and management alike, co-constituting the social world of corporations, as I tried to showed in the previous chapter.

The crucial contribution of Lacanian approach is the postulation that what binds the subject (corporate worker) to its symbolic identification (image of the corporate employee propagated by HRM) is the support of enjoyment (*jouissance*). Lacanian

¹⁵³ Casper Hoedemaekers, “Traversing the Empty Promise: Management, Subjectivity and the Other’s Desire,” *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 22, no. 2 (2009), p.190.

subject is split between ‘the subject of jouissance’ (real) and ‘the subject of signifier’ (symbolic), which brings about what Lacan calls the barred subject (\$), the barred emphasizing that there is always a disjunction. Hence the subject can never be fully identified in the symbolic due to the latter’s constitutive lack. The relation between Law and the subject or the latter’s entrance into the sociosymbolic order entails a ‘castration’, which brings about a castrated ‘phallic jouissance’. In other words, the prohibition of (presymbolic, noncastrated, full) jouissance is never a complete prohibition from enjoyment as such because the superegoic imperative of jouissance underlies ‘the prohibitive and regulative role of public law’¹⁵⁴. Hence, the symbolic order where the signifiers represent the subject to other signifiers can only function by producing affective surplus – jouissance, domestication of which sustains the former. In other words, ‘jouissance reemerges within the symbolic, in the subject’s unstable relation to a law that demands the subject to enjoy, but not to do so excessively.’¹⁵⁵ This superegoic injunction to enjoy binds the subject to its symbolic identification. The important point to underline is that this subjective identification is not ensured through jouissance itself which has ‘ambiguous, excessive and unstable nature’¹⁵⁶, but rather through attempts to domesticate and control it. And this is where fantasy comes into the picture and explains how a modality to relate to the ‘phallic jouissance’ sustains the promise of full jouissance, thereby regulating subjective orientations in a way that helps to reproduce the socio-symbolic order. However, as I will problematize below, this process of ‘reproduction’ should not be seen as a smooth, totalizing process of control over the affective economy.

¹⁵⁴ Madra and Özselçuk, “Jouissance and Antagonism In the Forms of the Commune: A Critique of Biopolitical Subjectivity.” p. 490.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

Fantasy offers the promise of an encounter with full *jouissance* (which is always-already lost). Fantasmatic narrative relies on this promise of fullness, a way to cover this ontological lack: ‘Fantasy is a scenario that veils the lack in the Other effected by castration. In Lacan, the structure we always find in fantasy is this relation between the split subject, the lacking subject and the promise of the elimination of this lack or of a compensation for it amounting to its structural neutralization.’¹⁵⁷

Fantasy is always referred to as imaginary, since it attempts to support the inherent lack of the symbolic; but the relations between imaginary, symbolic and real can enable us to grasp the illusionary nature of what we call ‘reality’: fantasy as a support emerges when the lack becomes evident, when the encounter with the real, the unsymbolizable occurs. Castration as the prohibition of full *jouissance* gives rise to the desire which is structured around the pursuit of fullness. However, as I mentioned above, the lack of full *jouissance* (which is always-already lost) as an ontological condition for Lacanian psychoanalysis brings us to ‘phallic *jouissance*’ or partial *jouissance*, which is the only possible form of *jouissance* in the sociosymbolic order. What needs to be emphasized is that this mythic full *jouissance* is introduced by the symbolic itself; it is only created retroactively – rather than being already there as a presymbolic or beyond symbolic Real. “[The vase] creates the void and thereby introduces the possibility of filling it. Emptiness and fullness are introduced into a world that knows not of them.”¹⁵⁸ Or, as Zupancic puts it, signifiers function only by producing a ‘useless surplus’ and relies on this ‘enjoyment as impossible’¹⁵⁹.

¹⁵⁷ Yannis Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political* (London: Routledge, 1999). p. 46.

¹⁵⁸ Lacan, *Seminar VII*, p.120, in Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, p. 44.

¹⁵⁹ Alenka Zupancic, “When Surplus Enjoyment Meets Surplus Value,” in *Reflections on Seminar XVII. Jacques Lacan and the Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Justin Clemens and Russell Grigg (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 171.

The duty to enjoy is a command to imitate this impossible enjoyment. In other words, the promise of full jouissance is what the individuals invest through a modality of jouissance; and the obtained (partial) jouissance or ‘semblance surplus jouissance’ – the excess – sustains the imaginary fullness of the symbolic order by binding subjective investments in fantasy. In this unending quest for full jouissance, each time the prevention of jouissance and the derived (partial) jouissance as a ‘useless surplus’ sustains desire. In other words, desire keeps away the subject from (destructive) jouissance.

Fantasy then relies on the very dissatisfaction of the experienced (partial) jouissance: attempts to acquire full enjoyment and the simultaneous realization of ‘that’s not it!’ “reinscribes lack in the subjective economy, the lack of another jouissance, thereby reproducing the fantasmatic promise of – and desire for – its recapture”¹⁶⁰. In other words, through this process of the partial enjoyments, desire for full enjoyment is sustained and inherently impossible identification attempts are repeated. This inextricable dialectic between symbolic authority and fantasmatic enjoyment is called ‘mutual engagement’ by Stavrakakis¹⁶¹. Considering the two in a relationship of co-constitution emphasizes the fundamental mechanisms of subjectivity: every symbolic command is based on a promise of jouissance; the lack in the Other always need a fantasy support in quest for this full jouissance (real) through enactments of (partial) jouissance for its maintenance.

¹⁶⁰ Yannis Stavrakakis and Jason Glynos, “Lacan and Political Subjectivity: Fantasy and Enjoyment in Psychoanalysis and Political Theory,” *Subjectivity*, no. 24 (2008), p. 262.

¹⁶¹ Yannis Stavrakakis, “Beyond the Spirits of Capitalism? Prohibition, Enjoyment, and Social Change,” *Cardoso Law Review* 33, no. 6 (2012), pp. 2289–2306.

Yannis Stavrakakis, “Symbolic Authority, Fantasmatic Enjoyment and the Spirits of Capitalism: Genealogies of Mutual Engagement,” in *Lacan and Organization*, ed. Carl Cederström and Casper Hoedemackers (London: MayFlyBooks, 2010), pp. 59–100.

Transgressive Jouissance

In critical management studies the formation of workers' subjectivities through different regimes of jouissance is analyzed. Hoedamakers conceptualizes human resources management practices as relying on the fantasmatic promises of an ideal self-image and shows how this 'ego-ideal', i.e. a committed employee valuable to the organization, is sustained through 'the form of competences to be improved, challenges to be met, promotions to be received and so on'¹⁶². Faced with this rhetoric of management which tries to 'count' the subject's enjoyment, workers are stuck with the question of 'what does the other want from me?'¹⁶³. Hoedamakers argues that the management discourse tries to channel working subject's desire and lead the worker to 'sacrifice jouissance in the present, in order to gain future jouissance as promised within the fantasy'¹⁶⁴. What needs to be remembered here is that this fantasy of sacrifice can only be possible through partial enjoyments derived by workers.

Based on Julian Orr's study on Xerox repair technicians, Alex Contu and Hugh Willmott analyzes the ways in which the workers, while they don't identify with a 'corporate culture', or, invest in the ideal procedures and documentations designed by the management, nonetheless simultaneously fulfill the desire of capital by making use of improvisations which make their services more profitable and efficient to the corporation. These workers transgress the official labor regime with

¹⁶² Hoedemaekers, "Traversing the Empty Promise: Management, Subjectivity and the Other's Desire." p. 192.

¹⁶³ Relying on Lacan's formulation of four discourses, Hoedamakers calls this 'the hysteric's discourse'.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

an ‘economy of desire’ in which they identify themselves as ‘heroes’¹⁶⁵. Stavrakakis draws attention to how ‘this transgression - and the concomitant failure to meet a publicly affirmed ideal - can serve as a source of enjoyment’ for workers¹⁶⁶. To put it differently, the logic of what is called ‘decaf resistance’ by Contu¹⁶⁷ reveals that ideals make possible the enjoyment of their transgression which, in turn, sustains them. Zizek’s ‘institutional unconscious’ refers to this ‘disavowed underside’ which sustains the functioning of institutions¹⁶⁸. The work practices then, which are transgressions of the officially affirmed ‘corporate values’ or of the official narrative of ‘how the things get done’ in general, may also be ‘partial deviances’ ‘that ultimately benefit the corporation’¹⁶⁹.

As I explained above, the superegoic command to enjoy should be considered in the mutual engagement of the signifier and jouissance. Transgressive jouissance which can also become a fantasy support can then be considered in the framework of the superegoic component of Law, which secures the prohibition in a more complicated way than ‘raw prohibition’. Chiesa argues that both ““massive” jouissance of mythical transgression and the “short satisfaction” of the jouissance are structurally inherent to the superegoic component of any symbolic/signifying order”¹⁷⁰ and this

¹⁶⁵ Alex Contu and Hugh Willmott, “Studying Practice: Situating Talking About Machines,” *Organization Studies* 27, no. 12 (2006), pp. 1769–82.

¹⁶⁶ Stavrakakis, “Symbolic Authority, Fantasmatic Enjoyment and the Spirits of Capitalism: Genealogies of Mutual Engagement.” p. 68.

¹⁶⁷ Alex Contu, “Decaf Resistance,” *Management Communication Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (2008), pp. 364–79.

¹⁶⁸ Slavoj Zizek, *Violence* (London: Profile, 2008), p. 142.

¹⁶⁹ Stavrakakis, “Symbolic Authority, Fantasmatic Enjoyment and the Spirits of Capitalism: Genealogies of Mutual Engagement.”, p. 68.

¹⁷⁰ Lorenzo Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness: A Philosophical Reading of Lacan* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2007), p. 183.

‘superegoic moral law real-izes the Symbolic’¹⁷¹. According to him, collective fantasies which entail ideology and its superegoic jouissance, are put into use through the dialectics of Law and desire¹⁷². In this sense, work as self-transgressive enjoyment can emerge as a support to the publicly affirmed ideals of the corporation. Respectively, the question of resistance to the corporate ideology or of how to establish another relation to the ‘phallic jouissance’ becomes more complicated when these acts of transgression are regarded as nothing but fantasy supports which can also be used by the management for channeling the working subject’s desire. Carl Cederström and Rickard Grassman offer crucial examples in this context; the neonormative managerial regime of Google, where workers are encouraged to transgress ‘working’ (as by driving scooters in the corridors), relies on the ‘blend of work and recreation – an intermixture of fun and seriousness’¹⁷³. This environment of ‘controlled pleasure’ which seems to be transgressive, points to the disavowal of the lack and the encouragement of an illusion of not being at work. The authors provide a second corporate culture, which they call ‘masochistic reflexive culture’ in a London based consulting firm where workers are encouraged to publicly criticize their working conditions. Here, the control mechanism of the management relies on publicizing (and enjoying) the ‘institutional unconscious’ – ‘the brute conditions of capitalist work-relations’¹⁷⁴ as the obscene underside of the functioning of the firm. These psychoanalytical reflections on transgressive jouissance complicates the picture of ‘resistance’ at work by showing how transgressions of officially affirmed

¹⁷¹ Ibid, p.176.

¹⁷² Ibid, p.136.

¹⁷³ Carl Cederström and Reickard Grassman, “The Masochistic Reflexive Turn,” *Ephemera* 8, no. 1 (2008), p. 46.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 56.

corporate ideals or publicly affirmed narratives of ‘how to get the things done’ can become constitutive in the smoother functioning and control at the workplaces. Hence, the question of ethics and search for another modality of *jouissance* should be asked in the light of this paradoxical character of transgression. The ethics of psychoanalysis in Lacan’s theory as relying on the ‘traversal of fantasy’ and ‘pure desire’ should then be seen not as transgression of Law *per se* but rather as a transgression of the superegoic command to enjoy¹⁷⁵.

The Plaza Action Platform meetings and workshops as a space where workers collectively discuss workplace imperatives and narrate their own involvement in corporate functioning become constitutive of a particular “white-collar worker” political subjectivity. The discussion of ‘transgressive *jouissance*’ becomes important in this context because of two reasons: first, the workers enjoy speaking in the meetings what everyone knows in the workplace but is not ‘officially’ allowed to be spoken – the underside of the organizations, the inherent transgressions of capitalist labor regime are publicized. Secondly, the platform claims to construct relations of solidarity by liberating the collegial relations among (co)workers from the regulatory management and HRM practices. In other words, the participants enact a transgression by organizing under PEP; they violate officially delineated codes of workplace behavior in favor of constructing new and unauthorized ones. My argument is an attempt to follow this dual meaning of transgression – both as publicizing a secret, namely the shared work experiences, and

¹⁷⁵ Lorenzo Chiesa, “Lacan with Artaud: J’ouïs-Sens, Jouis-Sens, Jouis-Sans,” in *Lacan: The Silent Partners*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2006), p. 352.

as generating the space out of the very act of sharing itself – in order to understand the formation and the reproduction of a critical space for thought and action (PEP).

Intimate Space of the Platform

As I discussed in the previous chapter, the issue of what not to talk about and to whom not to talk at work constitutes an important aspect of different management systems in various workplaces. PEP, however, opens a space where workers are encouraged to share these ‘hidden’ aspects of work, and thereby enables the institution of new social bonds among participants through sharing narratives of the underside of the corporate functioning and its supporting affective components. For the members of the platform, the relations of solidarity among employees can be constituted on a relation of friendship, frankness, and trust; which can only be possible by challenging the work’s intimacy through making public the hidden ‘personal’ aspects. Hence, the workshops not only encourage workers to talk about what they cannot or should not talk in the workplace, either with managers or co-workers, but also reveal the question of where and how to publicize these hidden aspects of work. The fact that the participants are scared of being recognized by their corporations leads them to conceal their personal information in any written material. Neither the workers’ names, nor those of the corporations are publicized in the transcriptions or reports of the workshops. Similarly, they don’t give photos or names in interviews. Thus, a mechanism of privacy is also at work for the organization of the platform. There exists two mail groups and the participants are allowed to be part of the small group only after they attend regular meetings long enough to prove their trustworthiness. And this, in turn, contributes to the construction of the platform as an important mediator for an intimate (counter)public

where the workers' intimate relation to work can be articulated and reflected upon collectively.

The story gets more complicated when some individual stories of transgression and their effects are considered. Similar to the way in which sharing information about wages result in increased competition, the following narrative of Kemal shows how the transgressive enjoyment of a worker can enforce the corporate ideal of efficiency. Employed in the accounting department of a research company, Kemal told in the workshop, that he has good relations with the other workers in the company and in different departments, which enabled him to chat with colleagues during worktime and to wander around the workplace instead of working. For him, these social relations he has with other workers make the work more bearable and enjoyable. However, he was surprised when he realized that his boss actually supported him due to the fact that the 'good' social relations he had with other employees would in turn benefit his own department, smoothing the way for various interdepartmental operations. In the face of the manager's interpretation he got angry to see how his 'real' social relations were put in the service of the company's (or the department's) profit, and consequently to witness how this was translated into a job requirement for him. Now, his managers expected him to wander and chat more. Spending time with other workers in the workplace and having 'real and good' social relations was a source of transgressive enjoyment for him. And the reaction of the management system can be interpreted as "co-opting opposition and neutralizing its radical potential"¹⁷⁶. Similar to the example of Google that I referred above, with the support of his boss, Kemal enjoyed his work as if he were not working. Once he was

¹⁷⁶ Stavrakakis, "Symbolic Authority, Fantasmatic Enjoyment and the Spirits of Capitalism: Genealogies of Mutual Engagement.", p. 69.

confronted with how his self-transgressive enjoyment enforced his boss' ideal of having a smiley finance department co-existing in harmony with other departments, he became suspicious of his transgression but nonetheless he accepted that he made things easier for his department. As I stated before, the aim of PEP is to generate social bonds among workers through bypassing the intermediary of corporations. Hence, the collective fantasy structure supporting the white-collar worker identification of the members relies on the ideal of unmediated social relations among the workers; which, as a transgressive jouissance, can sometimes serve to the companies' interests.

Similarly, workplace gossips can also be considered as a form of transgressive enjoyment in the sense that the workers' subjective investments in their work involve the enjoyment of their bosses' (and sometimes their co-workers') attitudes.

When for example we talk about wages, I immediately say mine. If I didn't come to PEP, maybe I would still say it. However I would not think that it can enable some kind of solidarity, it would rather be more personal, individualistic attitude; I would get upset if the other does not tell his or hers. And most probably it would end there. That means I would not go on to explain the reason of why not to hide it from your colleagues, how it is meaningless. I would not emphasize for example that we need to share this information not in order to tell everyone the difference of our wages but rather to be able to act together... After we started to come to the platform as a few people from the same company, we started to have lunch with our colleagues but without inviting the managers or directors. Maybe it was a coincidence but anyway the conversations in these occasions binded us together. They were mostly gossips, usually about who was in love with whom. But after a while, these turned into discussions about work; for example wages. Or we started to criticize and complain about how the company spends lots of money for silly organizations, like doing yearly meetings in a five-star hotel in Antalya. We had some discussions with friends who think that these organizations give us motivation.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ Elif, 25.11.2012. *Mesela, maaşlardan konuşuyoruz, ben pat diye söylüyorum. PEPe gelmemiş olaysaydım belki yine söylerdim ama bunu orda dayanışmacı bir ilişki kurayım falan diye düşünerek yapmazdım. Daha bireysel olurdu ve karşı taraf söylemediğinde bozulurdum; muhtemelen bozulduğumla da kalırdım. Yani orda oturup anlatmayabilirdim.... Biz birkaç kişi platforma geldikten sonra tüm ekip olarak birlikte çıktığımız öğle yemeklerinde yaptığımız direktör dedikoduları bizi bağladı – bunlar da daha magazinél şeyler, o onunla mı sevgiliymiş gibi. Sonrasında daha işe dair*

Hence, according to Elif, this contact among co-workers created relations among workers without the intervention of the management and contributed to the solidarity among them. On the one hand, the above narrative about the workers' relationships presented a conventional workplace setting where workers, in the absence of their directors and managers, enjoyed talking about them, mocking with them and complaining about working conditions and requirements they impose. In this sense, such conversations constitute an important unseen part that supports workers to continue in their work – a superegoic command to enjoy by the symbolic order of workplace. On the other hand, I would like to stress the instability of jouissance in this mechanism, as in every other, which has to be domesticated for a smoother functioning of organization. About four months after the interview which the above quotation is taken from, one Tuesday Elif came to the regular meeting of the platform, very excited and told us how during their last annual meeting, the 'team' of customer services which she was part of, challenged the company's policy about overtime and Saturday work. She told that the workers who had slightly different positions under the directors, talked before the meetings and decided to ask for a change in the conventional overtime practices; specifically not working on Saturdays. She explained how the workers who were used to gather without inviting the directors outside the workplace acted as they had decided, and told the same thing during the meetings. However, some workers in the team did not talk during meetings and told the others that they considered these problems as more personal problems and they would rather prefer to talk to the directors privately. This was also the reaction of the directors and managers: "You cannot have all the same problem;

şeyler de konuşmaya başladık; maaşı mesela. Ne bileyim dünyanın parasını verdikleri organizasyonlar oluyor, saçma sapan Antalya'ya gidiyoruz, onlardan dert yanmaya başladık filan. İçimizde bunun motive edici etkisi olduğunu düşünenlerle tartışmaya başladık.

you should come and talk to us privately to express your personal standpoint”. Such an organized confrontation in the meeting relied on the subjective investments of workers to bypass the intermediary of the management in their relations to co-workers. Hence, the intimacy of work mediated by the corporation became publicized and led to potential dissent.

This example demonstrates that rather than presuming a direct causality running from transgressive enjoyment to the ‘reproduction’ of work relations, or the enforcement of corporate ideals, one should study the concrete circumstances in which the transgressive (partial) *jouissance* (derived in this case from sharing the secrets about work practices) is channeled. In the example of PEP, workers open up an autonomous space through the circulation of narratives of transgressive enjoyment at work. Hence, the platform, constitutive of the political subjectivity of *white-collars*, can be considered as a way of channeling subjective investments of workers; which intervenes in the affective economy of laboring underlying the relation between managerial discourse and fantasmatically structured, partial enjoyment of subjects. I argue that this is the reason why emphasizing the inherent instability of *jouissance* in Lacan, enables us to see both the endurance of sociosymbolic order and the insights for its reconfiguration through the very struggles sustaining it. The platform, in this sense, can be a site in which the affective flows are channeled in ways such that it contributes to the reorientation of workers’ attachments to their work.

Solidarity and Labor Movement

Plaza Action Platform is a white-collar solidarity network whose name refers to the plaza actions organized against the layoffs from IBM at the end of 2008. It is an independent platform founded by white-collars in order to

establish relations of solidarity among themselves, acquire skills for defending and claiming for their rights, and act as a part of the labor front.¹⁷⁸

Lastly, I want to draw attention to the expansion of ‘solidarity’ that is discussed above in terms of the white-collar worker’s search for an alternative collegiality. The significance of defining oneself as a ‘worker’ in this regard come into prominence in the construction of the white-collar worker subjectivity in relation to the labor movement in Turkey. As I stated before, the definition of white-collar worker include a distinction both from the upper level managers (executives, directors or bosses in general) and from the blue-collar or manufacturing workers. The latter is not a figure that is present in material working environment for most of the *white-collars*¹⁷⁹. Rather the figure of the ‘worker’ is usually identified with the ‘unqualified’ jobs in corporations in their everyday social relations.

When I asked Melisa her relations with her co-workers, she explained to me how they lacked the solidarity present among blue-collars in these words:

“There were friends in K company who were working as cleaning workers under a subcontractor firm, we still call each other. You cannot believe their networks. I mean the whitecollar doesn’t have this. For example, they can tell each other ‘the guy in the fifth floor is crazy, be careful!’. ... they meet almost every weekend, when one calls me or I call one among them to celebrate the feast, they pass the phone one another. But the whitecollar is isolated. Employees see one another as enemies, they hide everything from one another. ‘You must be the best’ but you alone, not together with your friend...”¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Plaza Postası (Plaza Mail - newsletter of PEP), 01.05.2012. *Plaza Eylem Platformu, ismini 2008 sonunda IBM’de işten çıkarmalara karşı yapılan plaza eylemlerinden alan bir beyaz yakalı dayanışmasıdır. Beyaz yakalıların kendi aralarında dayanışma ilişkileri geliştirmek, örgütlenme, hak üretimi ve savunusu konusunda beceri edinmek ve emek cephesinin bir parçası olarak varlık göstermek için oluşturduğu bağımsız bir zemindir.*

¹⁷⁹ Some workplaces make explicit use of white-collar and blue-collar distinction between office workers of marketing, accounting and administration; and manufacturing workers on the production side of the same corporation. In this case, workers are usually distinguished as ‘kapsam-ıçı’ (included) and ‘kapsam-dışı’ (not included), the latter signifying white-collars who are not included the collective bargaining of the unions.

¹⁸⁰ Melisa, 27.12.2012. *K.ta çaycı, temizlik işçisi olan arkadaşlar vardı taşeronda çalışan, hala telefonlaşıyoruz. Ve onların öyle bir networkü var ki inanamazsın. Yani mesela beyazyakada bu yok. Onlar birbirblerine 5. Kattaki adam çatlak aman ona dikkat et diyebiliyorlar mesela.... her haftasonu*

She referred to the workers in her company in order to explain how she observed that ‘solidarity’ among white-collars was lacking. The fantasy of relations of solidarity among workers, without the mediation of the corporation is an important force for the organization of the platform as I explained in this chapter. Hence, the tension of calling oneself ‘a worker’ is not only a simple discursive move by ‘conscious’ white-collars; this attempt of identification also bears important implications for the organizational strategies of the platform, especially for the alliances it makes with other labor organizations and actions.

The figure of the worker – seen as inferior to the white-collar in terms of working conditions or wage levels inherently related to the education levels – can become an aspiration for these white-collars who see themselves as *even* more precarious than unionized blue-collar workers. This came up when Sevda was explaining to me how her mother opposed every time she talked about herself as a worker and reminded her her education as an engineer: “What worker, you are an engineer!?”¹⁸¹ .

We have been studying from primary school onwards in order to work in a bank or to be an engineer but not to become a worker. However some of us are employed in *even* more insecure conditions than unionized blue-collar workers who have collective labor agreement right. (emphasis is mine)¹⁸²

görüüyorlar, bayram kutlaması için birbirimizi aradığımızda elden ele telefonu dolaştırarak bayramlaşıyorlar benimle.. ama beyazyaka izole, birbirlerine düşman gibi bakıyorlar, herşeyi saklıyorlar birbirlerinden... sen en iyi olmalısın, tek başına, arkadaşınla değil... maviyaka çok daha birlikte, belki bizden çok daha bilinçliler.

¹⁸¹ Sevda, 05.11.2012. “Ne işçisi kızım, mühendissin sen!?”

¹⁸² Nilay Vardar, Turnikeleri Açın, Plaza İşçileri Gececek! (Open the Tollgates, Plaza Workers Will Pass!), Bianet, 26 January 2012 <http://www.bianet.org/bianet/diger/135678-turnikeleri-acin-plaza-iscileri-gececek> (accessed on 28 January 2012). *İlkokuldan beri işçi değil, bankacı, mühendis olalım diye okuyoruz. Ama bazılarımız toplu iş sözleşme hakkı olan sendikalı mavi yakalı işçiden bile daha güvencesiz koşullarda çalışıyor.*

This comparison that a participant of the platform implicitly made in the interview quoted above, also led to a discussion in the meeting. Some criticized this tendency of comparing their situation with the workers; depicting their situation as being either more difficult, or less secure. Then they decided not to emphasize what they lacked, or what they had as an extra, in comparison to the workers in general, but rather to explain their own work and organization as *white-collars*. This discussion of how to represent the platform revealed the tension that the signifier ‘worker’ created in the organization of *white-collars*. Although there are differences among participants of the platform in the usage¹⁸³, my emphasis here is on the particular ways in which ‘solidarity’ is signified in the use of ‘worker’. The identification with the labor movement and their attempt to construct relations of solidarity with workers in general enable the participants of the platform to support various workers’ actions through distributing their flyers, participating to their actions and press releases¹⁸⁴, and also organizing particular meetings in various occasions.

The identification with the labor movement and the corresponding actions they take also pave the way for the novel forms of worker solidarity. When TEKEL workers engaged in an occupation in Ankara to demonstrate against the privatization of the state owned factories which in effect forced them to become contractual workers without any job security, *Plaza Eylem* participants distributed flyers to call plaza

¹⁸³ Defining oneself as a worker is not widespread among sociologically different occupational categories of white-collars. For example Yıldırım Şentürk states that the use of worker to define oneself is more common among the ‘lower office workers’ compared to the ‘professionals’ whose occupational positions have career expectations or opportunities (whether realized or not). Şentürk, “İstanbul’da Şirketler Dünyasının Profesyonelleri (Professionals of the World of Corporations in Istanbul).” See also Necmi Erdoğan, “Sancılı Dil, Hadım Edilen Kendilik ve Aşınan Karakter: Beyaz Yakalı İşsizliğine Dair Notlar (Language in Pain, Castrated Self and Corrosion of Character: Notes on White-Collar Unemployment),” in *Boşuna Mı Okuduk? Türkiye’de Beyaz Yakalı İşsizliği (Did We Study for Nothing? White-Collar Unemployment in Turkey)*, pp. 75–115.

¹⁸⁴ Tekel occupation in 2009, Casper unionization attempts and firings in 2012, one-day strike and 305 layoffs in Turkish Airlines in 2012 are among the most well-known examples.

workers to support TEKEL workers. Then they organized “a white-collar party” to raise money for support. One PEP member explained to me how they were called as ‘party people’ after this organization among their co-workers. Another such example was the breakfast organization with the Construction Workers Initiative where white-collars learned about the organization strategy of the construction workers in different sites and shared their own concerns about privacy in corporations. In these encounters the platform becomes a space for building relations of solidarity among workers.

Gezi uprising was an important moment for the mobilization of white-collars, as well as for other groups. Besides the two big protests in front of the well-known plazas of Istanbul¹⁸⁵, white-collars were also present in the Gezi Park. Since my research was already finished in June 2013 when the protests took place, I confine myself here to stating that after Gezi, when smaller forums on various issues became an organizational means for many attending the park forums, ‘white-collar forum’ also emerged as a space where I encountered what I have been following for the last two years. These forums were quickly named as ‘white-collar solidarity’ and they become another nodal point in the search of a new relationality for these workers. In addition to bringing together the network of white-collar organizations that I stated before, and individual employees who participated in the uprising, these forums of ‘solidarity’ also continued to invest in the labor movements by supporting two important worker occupation movements, respectively, at Greif factory of industrial packaging, and Kazova Textile Manufacturing. Especially for *Kazova* workers who sold the clothes in stock in order to start up a worker cooperative, the support of white-collars as an important marketing channel was crucial.

¹⁸⁵ Protests in front of NTV and Garanti Bank plazas, on 3 and 4 June 2013, respectively.

The search for solidarity of white-collar workers that is discussed throughout this chapter relies primarily on the fantasy of unmediated collegial relationships which they aimed to construct in the intimate space of the platform. As I tried to show, the emergence of the platform as a counter public for white-collar workers urges us to trace the affective economy of laboring outside corporations, in the construction of an autonomous space by the workers' self-organization which both sustains and disrupts the supposedly intimate and smooth functioning of corporate sociality. In this regard I problematized the ambivalence of transgression which can easily be confined to the corporate functioning in the Critical Management literature informed by Lacanian psychoanalysis. I argued that once transgressive *jouissance* is conceptualized from the standpoint of the excessive and unstable nature of *jouissance*, a theoretical space is opened up to inquire beyond the reproductionist tendencies of transgression and to consider its effects in the potential dissents and possible reorientations of workers' subjective investments. Lastly, the political subjectivity of white-collar in search of solidarity brings into the picture the tensions and alliances that are incited by the identification of white-collars as workers and of the platform as part of the labor movement.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The thesis analyzed the mobilization of white-collars in Istanbul after the 2008 economic crises. Although I focused on *Plaza Eylem Platformu* as a particular case cutting across different sectors, as I explained in the beginning, several organizations and the recent mobilization with Gezi Uprising should also be taken into account in this field for a more extensive study. In this regard this study aimed to contribute to this wider research of analyzing this recently formed segment of the labor movement in Turkey, namely, the organization of *white-collars* and the formation of their political subjectivities.

I began the thesis by contextualizing this emerging movement of white-collars within the institutionalization of a precarious labor regime. I overviewed the recent social science literature in Turkey on *white-collars* and described how the formal employment in the world of corporations is increasingly shaped by the human resources management mechanisms. Recent legal arrangements, together with the rise of private employment agencies as ‘professional’ subcontractors reveal the institutionalization of job insecurity for white-collars. Supplementing this literature, I defined precarity not simply in terms of the insecure employment conditions, but rather as an insecure condition of life which is constitutive for the subjective experiences of white-collar workers whose ordinary affective states are structured by a new narrative of ‘normal life’ for middle classes: Not only secure employment is left outside the norms of the labor market but also precarious life condition as a sense

of unpredictability, flexibility and adaptation to sudden changes has become and valued increasingly as the norm in the ‘good life’ of middle classes.

In the second chapter, I defined who the *white-collars* are and how they make use of this term by making it an empirical, countable category, always in tension with a loaded theoretical concept. I laid out the conceptual framework which allowed me analyze in the following chapters their labor process, their self-organization and the relation between these two. This chapter, relying on the emerging literature on immaterial labor, affect and post-Fordism, argued that the managerial mechanisms in corporations and Human Resources Management apparatus in particular, attempt to capture affective investments of the workers in their labor through penetrating the intimate relation that workers establish with their work and displacing the control onto the social relations at work.

In the third chapter I depicted these particular managerial mechanisms through which workers experience the ‘intimate’ control over the social relations at work. I focused on the managerial techniques that are discussed and challenged by the platform participants; namely job interviews, performance system, mobbing and firing. I analyzed how this mediation intervenes in the affective states of workers and becomes constitutive of their subjectivities. Relying on the workshops organized by the platform and the narratives that workers shared throughout my research, I focused on the particular mechanisms like secrecy, performance appraisal systems and mobbing, which induce inadequacy, anxiety, and fear as the affective states shaping the intimate relation of workers to their labor. Accordingly, I analyzed the production of knowledge about corporations by and among lower level managers, as they interact with the managerial tools and mechanisms, which attempt to count, accumulate and/or manage affective economy of laboring in corporations.

The fourth chapter was about the formation of the political subjectivity in the platform meetings where transgressing the prohibition of publicizing the privacy induced by the management mechanisms paves the way for the construction of the platform as a new ‘intimate’ space. Here, I aimed to trace the circulation of affects produced or modulated at work, through the sharing of narratives of work among *white-collars* in the space opened up by the self-organization of workers. The meetings and workshops of the platform are taken to be a new channel in the affective economy of laboring where workers publicize the hidden working conditions and share their intimate relations to laboring, mediated by the human resources techniques. Relying on Lacanian psychoanalytical theory and its particular use in Critical Management Studies, I analyzed the subjective attachments of workers to the corporate functioning (and their potential reorientations) in order to elaborate on the constitution of political subjectivities in the space of the platform which emerged as a counter public for *white-collars*.

This study problematized the subjectivity of *white-collars* in relation with their labor processes and self-organization as a platform in Istanbul. Managerial techniques in corporations reveal how the control over the social relations at work passes through the corporate mediations of workers’ relation to their labor. Here, intimacy as defining one’s relation to his/her labor becomes the space through which worker’s relation to the corporation, to his/her co-workers and to the platform is shaped. In other words, the affective economy of laboring in corporations relies on the management of this ‘intimacy’, and the struggle over it tells us much about both the labor process and political subjectivity of workers. Two basic claims around which *white-collars* unite in the platform reveal the centrality of this struggle: First,

rather than keeping secrets in the intimate relationship with work – which enhances control by capital – workers are invited to keep secrets among themselves, and in this way, to unite and constitute their political subjectivities against capital. Second, workers challenge the fantasy of having a real life outside work by challenging the dichotomy between intimacy and public.

The organization of the platform also reveals how the modern work life in the corporations of the 21st century not only obscures the separation between home and work, private and public, but more importantly it relies on a rhetoric of intimacy which target the management of the borders of private in relation to the public character of work. As I tried to show throughout this thesis, the struggle over defining and making use of the mechanisms that penetrate into the intimate relation of workers to their labor gives clues about the work life and the self-organization of *white-collars*. Also, it has important implications for a wider discussion about the middle class – formerly the sphere of secure lives and good citizens. Although the precarious life increasingly becomes the norm for a good middle class life, intimate relationality provides private spaces of comfort for individuals. In other words, not the job or employment relation itself but the ‘employability’, i.e., the personal capacities to be employable, constitutes the ground through which individual university graduates are supposed to invest intimately and allow corporate mechanisms to penetrate into this intimacy. Hence, this thesis, on the one hand, explored the ways in which this intimacy functions in the work lives of the educated, lower level managerial workers, on the other hand, it also attempted to question how intimacy paves the way for a potential politics of *white-collars*, the limits and possibilities that are opened up by their self-organization.

As I stated in the Introduction, Gezi Uprising in 2013 revived the discussion of the (new) middle class in Turkey. Mass participation of professionals to the protests, big demonstrations in the plaza district of Istanbul even led some commentators to define “the middle class characteristics” of the revolts. While I think characterizing the mobilization as a radicalization of the middle class would be omitting many other aspects regarding the recent social movements in Turkey, the formation of a new solidarity network among *white-collars* out of the forums organized in many neighborhoods after the Gezi uprising is certainly worth considering. *White-collars*, as one of the constituent groups of the uprising, established ‘White Collar Solidarity’ group and continued the form of politics they exercised before the uprising with an enlarged number of participants. Besides the two organizations, namely Plaza Action Platform (PEP - *Plaza Eylem Platformu*) and IT Workers Solidarity Network (BİÇDA – *Bilişim Çalışanları Dayanışma Ağı*), many individual plaza workers joined in the weekly meetings of this group which gathered information on different work settings, employment conditions, organized experience sharing workshops, prepared informative flyers, and supported various actions of other labor movements. Hence the analysis in this thesis is about an ongoing and changing organization by *white-collars*, and how they accumulate experiences and knowledge about a relatively new segment of labor in Turkey towards building an organizational capacity.

Lastly, I would like to draw attention to the links between the affective dimension of politics of *white-collars* discussed throughout this thesis and the crisis of the normal, ordinary middle class lives in Turkey. The deterioration of working conditions and increasing insecurity among university graduate, qualified employees constitute an

important axe of discussion in this regard. As I stated before, my aim in this study was to highlight a neglected aspect in this discussion; namely the affective dimension of precarity, which cannot be equated to the job insecurity per se. The analysis of intimacy that I aimed to provide in the context of white-collar labor and politics revealed how the affective dimension of precarity cannot only be understood in terms of the effects on workers' personality, or on workplace socialities that undermine feelings of security in life. Intimate space as a zone of familiarity, comfort and security emerges as the ground for both labor control and labor politics. In this regard when *white-collars* challenge corporate management of workers' intimate relationship to their own labor and invite workers to keep secrets and unite among themselves, they also open up a new discussion for the aspired middle-class life: they challenge the presumed security and comfort brought by the intimate space ensured by working (or being a good citizen). In this sense I believe that the emerging politics of *white-collars* offer important clues for a larger discussion of an affective politics of middle-class, which could potentially undermine the liberal understanding of the distinction between the private and the public.

APPENDIX

Flyers by *Plaza Eylem Platformu* on annual salaried leave of absence and severance payment rights

Zaten Sahip Olduğunuz Bu Fırsatı Nasıl Mı Kullanacaksınız?

Varolan haklarınızı talep ederek...

İŞTE HAKLARINIZ:

- Yıllık ücretli izin hakkından vazgeçilemez.
- Yıllık ücretli izin işveren tarafından bölünemez. İşçi isterse 10 günlük parçalara bölünebilir.
- İşçi isterse **tatile gidiş ve geliş süreleri için 4 güne kadar ücretsiz izin verilir.**
- Ücret iznin başlamasından önce verilmek zorundadır.
- Çalışırken kullanılmayan izin sürelerinin ücreti işten çıkışta bile ödenir.
- İş arama izni ve yıllık ücretli izin iç içe geçemez.

PEP TURİZM'DEN İNANILMAZ TATİL FIRSATLARI! TATİL BİZİM İŞİMİZ!

BEYAZ YAKALILARA ÖZEL!!!

PLAZA EYLEM PLATFORMU NEDİR?
Plaza Eylem Platformu, beyaz yakalıların kendi aralarında dayanışma ilişkileri geliştirmek, örgütlenme, hak ücretini ve savunusu konusunda beceri edinmek ve emek cephesinin bir parçası olarak varlık göstermek için oluşturduğu bağımsız bir zemindir.

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KIDEM TAZMİNATI KREDİSİ

* "Düydük ki bae bunlar 'vermeyiz' diyormuş! Hakınız dem bu sader elinizden kaçmıyort! Hakınız kaunmak için asle yaluz kalmıyort! PEP'e gelin."

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PLAZA EYLEM PLATFORMU*, İŞVERENE VERDİĞİNİZ BİR KREDİ OLAN KIDEM TAZMİNATINIZI HATIRLATIYOR:

- ☐ Emekliliğiniz* geldi ve işten ayrıldınız mı?
- ☐ Askerlik nedeniyle işten ayrılıyor musunuz?
- ☐ Sağlık nedeniyle işten ayrılıyor musunuz?
- ☐ Evlilik nedeniyle işten ayrılan bir kadın mısınız?
- ☐ İş şartlarınız işveren tarafından esaslı şekilde değiştirildi ve işten kendiniz mi ayrıldınız?
- ☐ İşten mi çıkarıldınız**?

KIDEM TAZMİNATI HAKKINIZ!

* 8 Eylül 1999'dan önce sigortanız başlamışsa, bu günden itibaren 3600 prim günü ve 15 yılı doldurduysanız, yaş sınırı doldurmasanız dahi işten ayrılıp birkiniz kudeminiz alabilirsiniz. Anayasal çalışma özgürlüğünüz saklıdır, yaş sınırına çalışarak doldurabilirsiniz.

** "Ahlak ve iyi niyet" kuralına uymamak gerekçesi ile çıkarılmadığınız takdirde geçerlidir (Ücretsiz izin, ücret indirimi ve kısa çalışma gibi şartlara zorlanamayacağınızı ve işveren kötü niyetle sizi suçladıysa, dava açabileceğinizi unutmayın).

Ödeme en son aldığınız brüt ücret üzerinden çalıştığınız her yıl başına bir aylık ücret tutarındadır (Dikkat: tavan ücret uygulaması vardır). Bir yılın üzerinde tam yılı tamamlamayan günler oransal olarak bu miktara eklenir. Kıdem tazminatı hesabına sigorta primi, işsizlik sigorta primi, yemek parası, ikramiye, yakacak-giyim yardımı, çocuk yardımı gibi parasal karşılığı olan her türlü düzenli ek ödemeler de eklenir. Binde 6,6 damga vergisi dışında kesinti yapılamaz. Tazminat ödemesi bölünemez ve nakit olarak ödenir. İşveren değişse de hak devam eder. İşçinin vefatı halinde iş sözleşmesi sonlanır, hakkı olan tazminat yakınlarına ödenir.

Kıdem tazminatı, işverenin hediyesi değildir. Ücretin, ödemesi sözleşme bitimine bırakılmış bir parçası gibidir. Kıdem tazminatı adeta işçinin işverene verdiği bir kredidir. **KIDEM TAZMİNATININ KALDIRILMASINA İZİN VERMEYİN! İŞVERENE VERDİĞİNİZ KIDEM TAZMİNATI KREDİNİZİ GERİ ALMADAN GİTMEYİN!**

*Plaza Eylem Platformu beyaz yakalıların kendi aralarında dayanışma ilişkileri geliştirmek, örgütlenme, hak ücretini ve savunusu konusunda beceri edinmek ve emek cephesinin bir parçası olarak varlık göstermek için oluşturduğu bağımsız bir zemindir.

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