“IT CAN HAPPEN ANYTIME”:
EXPERTS DEALING WITH THE RISK OF A FUTURE ISTANBUL EARTHQUAKE

by

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ABSTRACT

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This research focuses on the ways in which Istanbul earthquake professionals, i.e. members of civil society organizations for disaster preparation and search and rescue, scientists, engineers, and civil planners, navigate the current preparations for a strong earthquake that is forecasted to affect the city at some point in the coming decades. While state institutions have implemented several programs and are facilitating urban transformation projects in the name of preparing the city for an earthquake, I argue this a neoliberal governing approach, which I refer to as "disaster neoliberalism," has displaced the burden of preparation largely to individual residents of the city while disempowering some civil society organizations and privileging private companies. At the same time, this burden on individuals increases as class status decreases. Furthermore, I demonstrate that my expert interviewees occupied a complicated position, the limits of which they navigated through the use of laughter and humor. I show that in many cases, they oppose the cynicism concerning earthquake preparations that is all too prevalent within the city through their professional and personal initiative. At the same time, this thesis argues that the common narrative that inaction about preparations is part of "Turkish culture" may reinforce this cynical view and may be problematic for future disaster preparations due to its reliance on an idea of cultural essentialism and Occidentalism.

ÖZET

“HER AN OLABILIR”:
BEKLENEN İSTANBUL DEPREMİ ÜZERİNDE ÇALIŞAN UZMANLAR

LAURA ELISE NEUMANN

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Anahtar kelimeler: Uzmanlar, Deprem, Risk, İstanbul, Mizah

Bu araştırma önümüzdeki on yıllar içerisinde İstanbul’u etkilemesi öngörülen şiddetli deprem üzerinde afet hazırlıkları, arama ve kurtarma alanında çalışan sivil toplum kuruluşları, bilim insanları, mühendisler ve şehir planlamacıları gibi İstanbul depremi üzerine uzman olan kişilerin mevcut hazırlıkları ne şekilde yorumladıkları ve yönlendirdikleri üzerine odaklanmaktadır. Devlet kurumları şehri depreme hazırlamaya yönelik birçok program uygulamaya ve kentsel dönüşüm projeleri devreye sokmaya başlamış olsa da, bu sürecin “afet neoliberalizmi” olarak tanımlayabileceğimiz bir çerçeveden yapılıyor olması, hazırlık sorumluluğunun ağırlıklı olarak şehrin sakinlerine bırakılması, sivil toplum kuruluşlarının güçsüzleşmesi ve özel şirketlerin ayrıcalık kazanması gibi sonuçlar doğurmaktadır. Bireylere yüklenen bu sorumluluğun sınıfsal statü düştükçe daha da ağırlaştığı gözlemlenmektedir. Bu araştırma göstermektedir ki uzmanlar bu süreçteki karmaşık rolleriyle başederken mizah önemli bir araç olabilmektedir. Aynı zamanda, pek çok durumda, deprem hazırlıkları konusunda topluma hakim olan kinik duruşa karşı uzmanların profesyonel ve kişisel alanda inisiyatif almayı seçtikleri gözlenmiştir. Öte yandan, bu tez, harekete geçememenin ve önlem almamanın “Türk kültürünün” bir parçası olduğu yönünde uzmanlar arasında yaygın olan görüşün, kültürel özcülük ve Garbiyatçılık fikrine sırtını dayıyor olmasından dolayı mevcut olan kinik görüşü güçlendireceğini ve gelecekteki afetlere yönelik çalışmalar açısından da sorun oluşturacağını iddia etmektedir.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

As one of the largest cities in the world, Istanbul is host to more than 15 million people who live in an area that stretches over 5,000 kilometers. The city is situated right next to the North Anatolian fault line, which runs just south of the city, under the Marmara sea. The reason why the exact location of the fault line is now known is the same reason why many residents of Istanbul understand that a possible earthquake looms in the future: namely, the 1999 Marmara earthquake that struck a large area that included the industrial region of Izmit, the coastal city of Yalova and parts of Istanbul as well. After the movement of the plates during this massive seismic event, scientist were able to conduct projects under the sea to explore and map the fault line's location next to the city of Istanbul. At the same time, the painful history of loss during the Marmara earthquake also reminds Istanbul residents that such a disaster happened in the past; due to warnings from scientists, it is generally known that another earthquake around magnitude 7.0 is forecasted to happen again on the same fault line, this time closer to Istanbul proper. In the Marmara earthquake, it was reported that around 17,000 people died, but the number is likely much higher, since this does not account for the missing (Green 2005).

I first learned about the seriousness of this issue in 2011 when I moved to Istanbul for the first time, two months after which a small earthquake in western Turkey also shook parts of Istanbul and the house I was living in. I did not personally even feel the house move, but my roommate felt it and it sparked a discussion - as small earthquakes typically do - about the possibility of the large earthquake that is supposed to occur. For some residents of Istanbul, not only the smaller earthquakes in the region but also the condition of various buildings in the city remind residents about the danger of a possible earthquake threat. There are 41 districts and 782 individual neighborhoods in the city, and each one has a different history of construction and population. However, for many people I spoke with, many of the buildings that comprise the city are met with suspicion as to their safety and as to whether they would become dangerous in a possible earthquake.

This is not aided very much by construction standards in the city. During the process of writing this thesis, for instance, a group of friends and I went to lunch together in one of the central neighborhoods in the city. On our walk to the restaurant, we saw that a bulldozer had somehow been transported on the top floor of a three-story concrete parking garage, and the bulldozer was smashing materials and moving quickly on top of this building that was already crumbling. My friends and I all walked quickly, half-running, when we were on the street under the side of the building. When we asked another friend later why she didn't join us for lunch in the end, she said she saw the bulldozer on top of the building and turned back, since this was the main road to reach the restaurant - she did not want to risk walking under it.

When walking around the city, there are a myriad building styles, and if one examines the structure with one's naked eye, there are some buildings that do not look strong or safe enough, such as the houses whose additional stories stick out above the rest of the floors and hang over the street below; these buildings are evidence of construction amnesties that are granted periodically and which legally allow such structures to stand, even though they are against the building codes. However, for the vast majority of Istanbul residents, if they are to walk around and try to assess a building's safety merely by looking, the dilemma is that such a method can only be so accurate without the required knowledge about engineering and construction. What's more, whereas some other countries such as Chile have widespread information campaigns educating the public about earthquakes and the specific risks they pose, Istanbul does not generally have signs and warning posts in public areas, and the current education programs have mainly been conducted in schools since 1999, leaving out a significant portion of the population that left school after that time (Berlinski 2011).

For this thesis, I spoke with people who do concern themselves with earthquakes in their professions in some way, whether through preparation efforts, research or city planning. These people were Istanbul residents, most of whom had lived in Istanbul for most of their lives, and whose jobs dealt with the topic of earthquakes in one regard or another. Thus,

they were people who both had a high level of knowledge about earthquakes and about the situation facing Istanbul in terms of another earthquake, as well. In this thesis, I attempt to explore how these professionals who dealt with the earthquake issue conceptualized the current situation in Istanbul in 2017. In terms of experts' professional lives, I attempted to understand not only what work they themselves were conducting on this issue, but also what kinds of barriers or limits they may have met in their efforts when it came to helping prepare the city, especially since the person with whom I conducted my pilot interview had expressed a worsening of the preparation efforts in the city. I also attempted to understand how they navigated the risk of a large-scale earthquake in their personal lives: if they had an earthquake kit, if they avoided certain buildings in the city, and how they approached this risk in general in their daily life, especially as people who had a higher level of knowledge as compared to the general population. In the first main chapter, Chapter 2, I give a brief outline of the current conditions regarding preparation in the city when it comes to the concept of responsibility and four groups: individual residents, civil society organizations, scientists, and the state. In Chapter 3, I explore how the presence of humor or laughter featured in all of my interviews in various ways and with multiple possible interpretations as to how this spoke to people's sense of agency regarding the earthquake threat just as it may possibly encourage inaction. In Chapter 4, I focus on the concept of encountering inaction, that is, how my interviewees talked about people close to them who did not take action against the earthquake, and how some of their explanations about "Turkishness" seemed to support this inaction through cultural essentialism. In the following sections I outline my methodology for my interviews, the context for my interviews, and an overview of some of the theories employed.

1.1. Methodology

I conducted my first pilot interview in May 2016 with Emre, but did not start the main interviews until February 2017, when I interviewed Dilek and interviewed Emre again, this time while recording the conversation instead of taking notes as in the pilot. I conducted my final interview in September 2017, so the interviews were spread out over a period of several months. Each interview lasted roughly an hour. Two or three only lasted 45

minutes, but a handful of others lasted around 1 hour 30 minutes. All 10 interviews were conducted almost completely in English, with the exception of a few comments and phrases in Turkish that my interviewee may not have known the translation for (in which case we often checked the meaning together online before proceeding if I also did not know the word).

I found my interviewees by contacting civil society organizations focused on earthquake preparation or education and university geological and engineering departments, and through asking interviewees to refer me to any other professionals they knew who may be interested in speaking to me. In order to protect the privacy and anonymity of my interviewees, I have changed my interviewees' names and have not given details about the institutions or organizations at which they worked. Before every interview, I let my interviewees know that they would be completely anonymous, even if they told me that it was okay if their real name was used; thus only pseudonyms are used for all interviewees. Two interviewees asked not to be recorded: Oktay and Ece. I conducted a full interview with Ece and a short interview with Oktay and I wrote notes during both interviews. 8 interviews were recorded, bringing the interview count to 10. In total, I had eleven hours of audio that I transcribed from those 8 interviewees.

Many of the people I spoke with were involved with earthquake preparation in more way than one: if they worked for a rescue organization, they may have also conducted research about preparation in another context; if they worked as a researcher, they may have joined a rescue organization in their free time to assist in the preparation efforts in another way. For this reason, it is hard to classify them into set groups, although I reached Emre, Oktay, Dilek, Osman and Hüseyin through civil society organization links while I reached Vedat, Ece, Yavuz, Filiz and Gülser through university and research center links. However, some people in the first group worked at universities and some people in the second group also talked to me about their work on disaster preparation training and rescue training. Of the civil society organizations, Emre worked at an organization focused on disaster preparation, Dilek and Oktay worked at a search and rescue organization, and Osman and Hüseyin worked as urban planners. Of the people I reached through universities, Vedat, Yavuz, and

Filiz were researchers in various types of engineering related to earthquakes, Ece was an architect, and Gülser was a seismologist.

My questions were divided into two broad categories: personal and professional, although they overlapped as well. Although I had a list, I did not ask every interviewee every question, since I guided the questions according to what topics we had already covered and how much time was available. For personal questions, I asked, for example, whether the interviewee had ever experienced an earthquake, if they had an earthquake kit or an emergency plan for their household, and whether the earthquake risk affected their personal life. In terms of their professional work, I asked how their job connected to the earthquake risk, what they thought about their contribution to the earthquake preparations, and whether their work has changed since they got started in the field, for example. I also typically asked what they thought about the current preparations in the city, how ready they thought the city was for a future earthquake, and how they imagined such an earthquake in the future.

1.1.1. Positionality

When I emailed, called or went to offices in person to request interviews, I introduced myself as a student in the Cultural Studies Master's program at Sabancı University. For many of my interviewees, I introduced myself and usually mentioned that I had lived in Turkey for a few years, and in a few cases we initially spoke in Turkish before the interview, especially if I was searching for interviewees and did not know who was comfortable speaking English at a particular office.

One of the most important aspects of the research in terms of my positionality was my status as an American in Turkey. I usually mentioned how much time I had spent in Turkey for this reason, and for the people who I had not made it clear, it usually came up in interviews when they were describing something about "how things go" in Istanbul. In one case, Yavuz asked me how long I had been in Istanbul, and when I answered roughly two years, he said, "Two years - so you know the economy is here, the population is here, the

everything is here [in Istanbul]." This exchange also occurred with Hüseyin (Yavuz was one of my first interviews while Hüseyin was my last, thus explaining the difference in time spent in Turkey):

> Hüseyin: It's very- you know... how long have you been to Istanbul?
> Laura: Almost 3 years.
> Hüseyin: 3 years. It's hard to live Istanbul, it's hard to live in Turkey and it's getting every day harder. So, uh, we all try to stay calm.[1]

As a foreigner and a foreign researcher at that, it is also possible that my positionality affected the types of answers my interviewees gave me or how they phrased their responses. In the end of chapter 4, I give an account of how frequently I was given the explanation that not preparing for a disaster is "Turkish culture." As a foreigner, it is possible that my interviewees felt the need to contextualize themselves as specifically Turkish, and to explain "Turkishness" and "Turkish culture" as they conceived of it since I was not from Turkey. In many cases in my interviews, for instance in many of the answers given by Dilek, the personal pronoun "we" was used for actions taken all over Turkey, in the past and in the present. This was ostensibly used to refer to "we" as "people in Turkey" or perhaps "Turkey as a nation."

For instance, when I asked Filiz about whether the city was ready for an earthquake, she seemed to use "we" and "our" to refer to Turkey or Turkish people. She said: "None of our cities are ready to an earthquake. And then, so far... in our history, the, there are, there were not many serious actions toward the earthquake." I noticed this pronoun in this answer specifically because she also noticed it: she made sure to correct herself to distinguish between "we" and the state. This is a continuation of her answer:

> "Now, after the '99 earthquake, we changed the strategy, I mean, the government changed the strategy. Now they put more importance on the pre-disaster preparedness [as opposed to post-disaster aid]."

In this answer, it not clear whether the "we" referred to Turkey in general or her institution. In some cases in my interviews, it is not clear who "we" refers to, but many of my interviewees seemed to use it to refer to Turkish people as a whole. Oftentimes this seemed

[1] Interviewees' comments appear as in my transcription and have not been edited.

to refer to Turkish citizens, since, for instance, Ebru differentiated between the way Turkish people respond to disaster and how Syrian migrants in Istanbul respond; I discuss some of these issues further in Chapter 4. This raises the question of if and how they may have responded differently had they been interviewed by a researcher from Turkey.

While I was a foreigner who did not grow up in Turkey in one sense, at the same time I was a resident of Istanbul just like my interviewees in another sense. While the amount of time I had spent in the city was much less than my interviewees, most of whom grew up in Istanbul, at the same time I was someone who experienced daily life in the city, who planned to stay there for the foreseeable future, and who was also invested in the city and its future on an emotional register. I primarily noticed this when I shared stories, experiences and -- as I discuss in Chapter 3 -- jokes and humorous remarks about my daily life in the city and about the earthquake risk. For my social circle back in the US, many stories about daily life did not seem to make sense to them, and my friends did not think the jokes about the earthquake were nearly as funny. Especially regarding dark humor about the earthquake, future uncertainty or violence, many in my US social circle did not "get the joke" or laugh uproariously as many of my friends in Istanbul did. This illustrated to me how my experiences and my ways of talking about them had adapted to Istanbul life, and they made me realize my emotional investment as well. Due to my connections in the city and my own residence there, I reacted emotionally when contemplating the possible earthquake in a way that someone outside of Istanbul, and without personal residence and investment in the city would typically not. This may have helped in understanding my interviewees as Istanbul residents, especially in Chapter 3 in regards to humor and in Chapter 4 inasmuch as I include a discussion of the emotions of my interviewees regarding people close to them failing to prepare.

The fact that my interviewees were both experts on the earthquake while also being long-term Istanbul residents was also important for their emotional and professional connection to the earthquake threat. When we discussed the future Istanbul earthquake, the question was not of a disaster hitting somewhere "over there," even in another Turkish city or another country, but something that would affect the buildings in which we were holding

the interview, their houses, my house, or anywhere we would happen to be in the city; thus my interviewees and I shared that commonality. Simultaneously, as highlighted by the anthropologist Dominic Boyer, by interviewing people who were experts on this topic, I was conducting a form of "para-ethnography" or "studying sideways" as coined by George Marcus and Ulf Hannerz respectively (Boyer 2015; Marcus 2004; Hannerz 1998). While my interviewees were experts in their fields - which Boyer defines as "[actors] who have developed skills in, semiotic-epistemic competence for, and attentional concern with, some sphere of practical activity" - as a student trained in anthropology, I brought my own sets of knowledge and expertise to our interaction. Boyer states that this kind of dynamic in which both parties hold specialized knowledge "[creates] a situation in which one kind of knowledge specialist, the anthropologist, analyses the ideas, conversations and practices of another" (2008, 39). He then goes on to question how an expert can "meaningfully engage the social experience of another culture of expertise without calling into question, at some level, precisely that expertise that is the ostensible locus of their social practice and 'culture'?" (40). Boyer is concerned with the overlap between these two centers of knowledge, and how they may inspire anxieties on both sides but also possibilities of creating new forms of knowledge and understanding through shared field sites, such as in para-ethnography. He also notes, as was the case in my research, that it is difficult to engage with experts very much outside short interviews in their professional space; this was true for my fieldwork as well, since every interview was conducted in my interviewee's office with the exception of one interview conducted over Skype from the interviewee's home (43).

Regarding this meeting of two different centers of knowledge, I acknowledged that at times I was using my interviews not only to understand my interviewees, but also to learn from them about the earthquake threat in general. Since I do not have formal scientific, architectural, engineering, civil planning or disaster preparedness training, there was much that my interviewees taught me about the current situation in Istanbul and about what we know about risk, earthquakes, and the response to earthquakes. Many of my questions would go back and forth between asking about what my experts knew about the situation to more questions that were more directed at their personal experience and understanding.

Thus I was both absorbing their formal knowledge and expertise (similar to what Boyer calls epistemophagy, or "the consumption and incorporation of external analytics"), especially about how they view and assess risk, just as I was inquiring about topics that tended to go outside of their expert knowledge, such as whether their family had an emergency plan or what they thought about the safety of their workplace. I also realized during the process of the research that my own desire to understand exactly how "risky" or dangerous certain areas, buildings or structures might be also prompted many of my questions about the nature of risk and how much we can understand it (for instance, in my discussion of prediction versus forecasting in Chapter 2). This once again showed my connection with my interviewees as someone who lives and resides in Istanbul, but who possesses much less knowledge of the earthquake risk, the city's buildings, engineering and structural concerns, and so on. My research participants thus also helped me to conceptualize the current issues and status of the city as I also analysed our interviews from the point of view of a social science researcher. In this fashion, there were many different points of commonality, such as residence and expertise, just as there were points of distance, as when I took a step back when transcribing and writing in order to show what our interviews may mean from an anthropological perspective.

Finally, my interviewees were also interested at times in my perspective as someone trained in anthropology and culture, and as someone researching Istanbul preparation with a "bird's eye view." For instance, on a more personal level, one interviewee asked me what I thought about his reaction to the earthquake threat after I asked him how he dealt with the possibility of this disaster. He asked me if I thought he was calm compared to other people I had spoken to, which I interpreted both as a question about how he compared in his field, if other people working on this issue were also "calm," but also as way to self-reflect on his own performance of expertise, since being "calm" was important in his own self-representation as a scientist and expert. Another interviewee, whose pseudonym I will also not mention, told me that she is very interested in the cultural aspect of disaster preparation. I have since emailed with her and shared some articles that I found useful and that seemed to cover topics we did not speak about in our own interview. With Hüseyin, we discussed topics in our interview several times that covered politics and culture generally, and he

mentioned that he himself asks his students for feedback and interaction on their thoughts as to why there is such a lack of action concerning the earthquake issue in Istanbul; he also expressed interest in reading this thesis. In these ways, there were many points at which my interviewees showed that they were also interested in gaining knowledge from others outside their discipline. At the same time, I offer my own analysis of this culture discussion that I engaged with many of my interviewees on in-depth in Chapter 4, since the idea of "culture" they used did not seem to match with the generally accepted conceptualizations of "culture" in anthropology today; I state that this has political ramifications for the preparation situation overall (Grillo 2003).

1.2. Literature review

As a research project, this thesis sits at the intersection of several different fields: on one hand, it is concerned primarily with the idea of a disaster, upon which the field of disaster studies is based. Susanna Hoffman and Anthony Oliver Smith's anthology *Catastrophe and Culture: The Anthropology of Disaster* covers many such examples in the field of anthropology in particular. One diffence between those studies and this thesis is the focus on a disaster that has not yet happened, but the possibility of which is being prepared for in the present. In terms of research and theses written on earthquakes in Turkey, many have been written from the perspective of psychology, trauma, and engineering in relation to the 1999 earthquake and its effects. This thesis concerns a disaster in the future, and about current feelings and expectations about something that has not happened, but has been predicted. As such, the thesis is more closely related to studies about the anthropology of the future and studies on the risk of disaster as well as disaster management (Beck 1992; Newhouse 2017; Lakoff 2008; Choi 2015; Anderson 2010; Hu 2010).

One project, the cultural anthropology PhD dissertation of Elizabeth Angell, covers the preparations for a possible Istanbul earthquake, and some themes from this research are covered in her 2014 article (Angell 2014). The study of the Van earthquake of 2011 by anthropologist Marlene Schäfers also covers an earthquake in Turkey, but it also includes a discussion about the future and future earthquake risk through its discussion of Van

residents' fear of aftershocks after the main earthquake (Schäfers 2016). Schäfers' 2014 article about the response to the Van earthquake in terms of civil society organizations is also relevant (2014). Several studies have been conducted, primarily through surveys, in the fields of risk management and disaster planning, on the topic of how Istanbul residents are preparing for the earthquake risk and how risk is perceived (Tekeli-Yeşil et al. 2010a; Tekeli-Yeşil et al. 2010b; Eraybar et al. 2010; Karanci 2013). Two key articles have also covered how disaster preparation has become the rhetoric by which large-scale urban transformation projects have been justified by the state (Demirtaş-Milz & Saraçoğlu 2014; Bartu Candan & Kolluoğlu 2008). For my first main chapter and its evaluation of the current preparation efforts in the city, I draw on studies that evaluate the 1999 earthquake and its response by the state, civil society and individuals, such as "A Critical Analysis of Earthquakes and Urban Planning in Turkey" and "Civil Society and the State: Turkey after the Earthquake" (Sengezer & Koç 2005; Jalali 2002; Kubicek 2002; Jacoby & Özerdem 2006; Jacoby & Özerdem 2008). In addition, since there is no such thing as a "natural" disaster and since the state of Turkey also does not differentiate between "natural" and "non-natural" disasters through its main instituion for the management of disaster, the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı, hereafter AFAD), I draw upon the Master's thesis by Sumru Tamer (n.d.). Her research explored the response of AFAD to three recent events or "disasters" in Turkey: an influx of refugees into the city of Suruç, the deaths of 301 mine workers at Soma, and the 2011 Van earthquake. However, with the exception of the 2014 piece by Angell, this thesis draws on studies in related fields of study in order to illustrate the current situation of how experts confront and live with risk in Istanbul during the time of my fieldwork.

1.3. Theory

The theme that ties together the three main chapters can be said to be the idea of risk, namely the current structures in place today in regards to the earthquake risk, and my interviewees' responses and encounters with risk and risk reduction actions in Istanbul. In the second chapter, one of the main inspirations I use my analysis of the situation overall is Vivian Choi's article "Anticipatory States: Tsunami, War, and Insecurity in Sri Lanka,"

which covers, like my own field, a past disaster and a possible future disaster in a country whose state has a large role to play in disaster response and risk management. What's more, her work also includes fieldwork among Sri Lankan residents and an analysis of their own feelings of anticipation of disaster (2015). Choi describes Sri Lanka during her fieldwork as a site of "disaster nationalism," and I employ the research by Tamer to contextualize this for Turkey, showing that nationalism usually factors into the state response after a disaster has already occured in Turkey. I also reference her insightful description of how an affect of "care" and mourning are instrumentalized in these post-disaster responses. However, for the purposes of this thesis, I state that Istanbul is more aptly described as being a site of "disaster neoliberalism" when it comes to the earthquake preparation environment. Neoliberalism affects the way in which individuals must prepare for possible disasters themselves, and it also accounts for the way in which civil society fails to have a strong and comprehensive relationship with the state. When I address the role of scientists and experts, I draw upon research in science studies that evaluates how scientists working on earthquakes have been affected by recent criticism of and even criminalization of seismologists by governments, particularly in regards to the case of the L'Aquila earthquake in Italy (Joffe et al. 2017). In addressing the current role of the state in terms of the earthquake preparations, I draw on the myriad literature on urban transformation in Istanbul just as I incorporate assessments that state that rising authoritarianism has affected the political environment in Turkey in recent years (Baybars-Hawks & Akser 2012; Günay & Dzihic 2016; Eraydin & Taşan-Kok 2014; Akçalı & Korkut 2015; Güzey 2016; Adanalı 2013; Gibson & Gökşin 2016). Through this theoretical background I attempt to map out the some of the relations between these different actors and some of the conditions in the city during my fieldwork.

In the Chapter 2, I draw on studies of humor and laughter, especially in regards to politics and various political environments, and through an analysis of the function of "joke-work" to consider how my interviewees reacted to the uncertainty inherent in the earthquake risk situation in Istanbul (Trnka 2011; Bernal 2013). In Chapter 3, I use analysis of affect and emotion, primarily through the work of Sara Ahmed, to interpret the possible position of my interviewees in regards to affect when they relate to their friends, family, and people

close to them; I also consider issues of cultural essential in interviewees' oft-repeated explanations of inaction through "Turkish culture." I also bring up how my study compares to research on risk that takes a more top-down and financial view of risk as productive.

Overall, in this thesis I argue first that, through the current "disaster neoliberalism" in effect, the burden of responsibility to prepare for a large earthquake is largely shifted to individuals; while the Turkish government does operate on various levels in terms of conducting disaster management, the approach appears to be more and more centralized at the cost of pushing out some civil society organizations centered around disaster response and management. In the middle of these groups, scientists and experts strategically navigated their position as public figures in terms of politics just as they used emotional or social tactics like stigmatization in order to differentiate themselves from other public figures in the media. Furthermore, I argue that the frequent occurrance of laughter and humor showed that experts may have been reacting to an overwhelming situation in which they did not have many avenues through or resources with which to act, but that at the same time humor supplied a form of agency through the construction of narratives and sense of in-group feeling. Finally, I demonstate that while much of the literature on risk considers risk to be something "productive," I make the point that this productivity decreases as one's relative economic and political power decreases, with individuals mainly only producing anxiety in response to this risk. In terms of experts as subjects, I analyze how my interviewees' reactions to the people close to them in their lives who have failed to take action against an earthquake shows that they can be considered, in a sense, "affect aliens" as coined by Sara Ahmed, and that they thus reject the cynicism described by Yael Navaro-Yashin in taking purposeful action on this topic.

Chapter 2

Dynamics of responsibility in the Istanbul preparation field

During my fieldwork in Istanbul in 2017, many factors came together to emphasize an environment in which many experts on the news media cautioned Istanbul residents that an earthquake would occur at sometime in the coming decades, which subsequently put emphasis on the idea that the city should do something to prepare for the disaster before it occurs. This relates to the idea that there is no such thing as a "natural" disaster - especially in the case of earthquakes, a large amount of the risk level for such an event comes down to the physical building itself and how it was constructed. Earthquakes are primarily a high-risk disaster only for developed urban areas, since sparsely populated rural areas with one-story buildings have less risk, for example, due both the low population and a lower-risk building structure.

Thus it can be said that, for many in Istanbul, a possible future has been conjured up that emphasizes anticipatory action to mediate the damage and loss from a possible earthquake. This is not the only future that Istanbul residents can imagine or anticipate, of course, since some media sources have also spread an idea that such an earthquake will definitely not come in our lifetimes- thus creating a safer possible future that residents may be able to hold on to with reduced anxiety and with a reduced burden of action needed to be taken in the present. However, if such a future in which an earthquake will very likely occur in the following decades is taken up, the issue of responsibility and accountability concerning preparation also becomes relevant.

In this chapter, I use the notion of responsibility to evaluate four different groups or levels within the landscape of Istanbul earthquake readiness: individuals, civil society groups, scientists, and the state. The main theory through which I place these actors and their responsibility is the idea of neoliberalism; specifically in the case of the earthquake I term this "disaster neoliberalism" as an alteration of Choi's "disaster nationalism" (2015). Under this type of government, individuals are left to bear the responsibility of earthquake safety

largely on their own, while civil society also faces challenges in terms of lack of support or even obstruction by the state. I also note that the general political instability in Turkey in the past few years has hurt civil society organizations' effectiveness, as have increasing efforts at centralization of control over disaster areas by the state as opposed to civil society organizations. Scientists, as public intellectuals, have negotiated their role and responsibility through their narratives they express to the public, shunning excessive responsibility put on their shoulders and reminding the public that earthquake preparation is crucial to focus on. In terms of the role of the state, I show that disaster neoliberalism is still very much about nationalism, as well as the state, in terms of its partnership with capital and the way it prepares for disaster. In particular, the state's efforts in recent years to exert control over sites of disaster through institutions such as AFAD (the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency), as discussed by Schäfers and Tamer, point towards a strategy by the state to become the only main actor and the hegemonic actor in a post-earthquake scenario in Istanbul.

2.1. The Push Towards Individual Preparation

Under neoliberalism, what may have previously been the domain of the state or civil society groups becomes the responsibility of the individual as the state is "hollowed out" and placed in private hands: it thus becomes beneficial for the state and private companies to encourage a notion of "individual responsibility" to replace state or collective action. As the geographer David Harvey summarizes, "This is a world in which the neoliberal ethic of intense possessive individualism and its cognate of political withdrawal of support for collective forms of action can become the template for human socialization," citing as an example a Norwegian study that charted an increase in individualistic language in the media over a period of decades (Harvey 2008; Nafstad et al. 2007). In their study on the effects of neoliberalism on two different neighborhoods in Istanbul, Ayfer Bartu Candan and Biray Kolluoğlu recount that Turkey and Istanbul have experienced a liberalization process of the economy starting in the 1980s, during which the state changed many legal codes to allow more privatization and state co-operations with private companies (2008, 12). This push towards placing the burden of "change" on individual people has been

documented, for instance, in the case of environmental preservation: even though corporations account for the bulk of carbon emissions, individuals are encouraged to limit their car use or the number of flights they take. In the same vein, some companies offer consumers the ability to "offset" their individual carbon output for a flight they take by paying an extra fee equivalent to the output. Under neoliberalism, the individual is encouraged to take care of her or his individual responsibility on various matters through participation in the market. This emphasis on the responsibility of the individual often obscures the much more powerful and effective role that corporations and the state play in environmental degradation.

In the same way, much of what I encountered in the field in terms of earthquake preparation in Istanbul also focused on one's individual responsibility to prepare oneself as opposed to collective action. A theme that came up many times was the idea of an earthquake kit, i.e. a stock of non-perishable food, water, medical supplies and survival items that would help to survive the first 72 hours after an serious earthquake. However, these earthquake kits need to be prepared each time by the individual, just as they must be replaced each year with new food, batteries, and medical supplies. These seem to have been provided at times on the municipal (*belediye*) level, since I found out that Beşiktas Municipality provided businesses with a small first-aid kit at no charge at least one time in the past. However, there did not seem to be an expansive coordinated program that provided earthquake kit materials in the city. Inherent in this idea is that the individual consumer has enough extra income to purchase and renew these supplies each year, which creates a classist dimension to this responsibility to prepare. In addition, this general lack of outreach showed that, in terms of the particular form of neoliberalism at work in Istanbul during my fieldwork, the burden of preparation was pushed to their shoulders of individuals despite the existence of a centralized institution responsible for the management of disasters across Turkey, AFAD.

The issue of housing is another responsibility that is pushed onto individuals by the state without sufficient support for many Istanbul residents. If one wants to live in a safer house, if they have the financial means, they may seek to live in a house that was built after 1999

when the building codes changed after the Marmara earthquake, or after 2007 when they were updated once more; this may reduce one's risk in a future earthquake. However, these newer apartments also require a higher income. Under the Disaster Law passed in 2012 (Law No. 6306 on Disaster Prevention and Transformation of High Risk Areas), owners of an "unsafe" apartment building may have their building destroyed and rebuilt in compliance with earthquake building codes. They may do this if their building is checked and found to be unsafe. However, under the law, only two-thirds of the building owners must agree about the building being destroyed; they may purchase the other one-thirds' property in order to continue with the demolition plan. This disadvantages the remaining one-third of owners if they disagree with the majority in their building. What's more, even if the owners cannot agree, the government has the right to conduct "urgent expropriation" after one year, through which they can force the building to be destroyed and rebuilt (Kentsel Dönüşüm ve Hukuk Platformu). More importantly, though, under this law tenants and people without legal property documents have no rights - besides a "one-off payment" for tenants (Adanalı 2013, 39). They are often informed with little notice that the building will be demolished. In the case of tenancy, the apartment owners may benefit from the increased real estate value of their new apartment, but the previous renters may be priced out of the new building, since it often increases greatly in real estate value. In his article criticizing the 2012 law, urban studies scholar Yaşar Adnan Adanalı states that "the participation of local stakeholders was envisaged neither during the drafting of the law nor in the aftermath – aside from bearing its costs," referring to the costs of inspection and demolition (2013, 39). For the poor who are affected by this law, they also bear the social costs as they are often pushed out of their communities and forced to start over in another area of the city. This also shows once again that under this particular "disaster neoliberalism," while the state has touted "urban transformation concentrated on earthquakes" (deprem odaklı kentsel dönüşüm) as a state initiative, its effects on the Istanbul are very much unevenly distributed (Angell 2014, 674).

In terms of the 1999 Düzce earthquake, a similar plight of renters and occupants without property rights was highlighted as they were not entitled to new houses given by the state after the earthquake. Of the civil society groups advocating for Düzce earthquake survivors,

DepDer was one group that campaigned for tenant and non-owner earthquake survivors to also receive housing from the state; this struggle is still on-going today for many non-owner Düzce survivors who were left homeless after the 1999 disaster (Johnson 2011, 418; Düzce Umut Atölyesi). Thus, while the pressure is on the individual "consumer" to secure their own safe housing within the market structure, tenants, those without sufficient financial means, and occupants of houses without official property rights are punished under this neoliberal shift of responsibility to the individual. The state assistance that is provided in this case only benefits owners; not only do they typically receive a home higher in real estate value, but their new home is likely safer in a future earthquake as well. In addition, it benefits the construction company itself, as most buildings are constructed with at least one extra story so that the company can sell the new, unoccupied apartment floor(s) for a profit. The individuals most disadvantaged by this are those who lack formal property titles (*tapu*), since they are forced back onto the increasingly expensive housing market. Most likely they will still not be able to afford earthquake-safe, newer housing if they could not before, and in many cases following urban transformation, non-owners and the poor in general are pushed to the margins of the city, due to general housing prices or as a part of the state's program itself, as has been done under the Mass Housing Administration (TOKİ) frequently in the past (Harvey 2008; Saraçoğlu and Demirtaş-Milz 2014).

The affective burden is also pushed onto the individual under this form of neoliberal capitalism. Individuals must research and educate themselves about safe areas, safe forms of housing, individual preparatory measures, and how to best navigate these systems for their own reduction of risk. As I describe in Chapter 3, since the exact level of risk is typically unclear to many Istanbul residents, this is a particularly stressful and confusing process to navigate as an individual since civil society or state-supported education campaigns are not relatively few in comparison to Istanbul's population, and since such sources of support and information like community education centers are lacking. For this reason, some civil society groups have proposed the future creation of open community education centers concerning earthquakes (Johnson 2011).

The idea that the modern subject must contend with and navigate various types of risk has been covered under the major theories of risk, among them the most well-known being Ulrich Beck's Risk Society (1992). Expanding and critiquing this approach to risk, Engin Isin argues that the "rational subject" that has been the basis of neoliberal society (in its responsibility to make rational decisions about its own risk-prevention) is accompanied now by a "neurotic subject" that must deal with various risks in a way that results in personal anxiety (2004).

As I argue further in Chapter 4, sociological surveys of various high-risk Istanbul neighborhoods have been conducted and have shown that a significant portion of those surveyed are not taking steps to prepare for a possible large earthquake. However, the neoliberal push I have outlined seems to have set the stage for general inaction in terms of making disaster preparations on an individual level. For instance, while children started receiving earthquake training in schools after 1999, Istanbul residents who left the education system before that time have not received such information on a systematic level. The relative lack of awareness-raising, training and support for earthquake preparation may encourage an environment of inaction for individuals. Even owners, who benefit from the state's 2012 disaster law, are forced into a bind through the stipulation that buildings deemed "unsafe" must be destroyed in one year. This push to make renewal mandatory may prevent some owners from even having their home checked if they would like to take other steps besides demolishment (such as retrofitting) if their home is found to be unsafe. Thus, while this is one facet of the law that may encourage inaction, in general, the neoliberal governing approach seems to have left many individuals in Istanbul unsupported and unsure about how to prepare, just as they are left to manage the anxiety about the earthquake on their own.

Additionally, what I found in the course of my fieldwork is that many of the search and rescue and disaster preparation education groups also push an individualist narrative about how to prepare for an earthquake. They focused on securing "non-structural hazards" in one's home that can fall or crash during an earthquake event, and encouraged people to secure any furniture to the wall. Chemicals and other hazardous materials are also be

checked to make sure that they do not become a health risk after an earthquake. While non-structural hazard mitigation is indeed very important, the fact that many of the prominent civil society organizations promoted non-structural, individualist changes also seemed to speak to the dominance of this type of action as the main course of action promoted in the public arena. With this being said, many of my interviewees in such organizations lamented the condition of the city's building stock and emphasized that structural changes were more important. Furthermore, there are also civil society and activist groups in the city, especially organized around specific neighborhoods, that contest and oppose urban transformation and systematic construction changes regarding earthquake preparation, such as those based on the 2012 Disaster Law. Thus civil society groups are generally varied in that some focus on non-structural changes while some have more political and structural demands. In the following section, I assess the current status of civil society groups, especially in light of recent political instability and increasing control of the civil society arena by the state.

2.2. Civil Society and Hindered Efforts at Responsibility

Much of the literature on civil society in Turkey in regards to disasters has noted the idea, popular in the field of disaster studies, that both the state and a strong civil society are needed together to comprehensively and effectively prepare for and respond to disasters (Johnson 2011, 416; Kübicek 2002; Jalali 2002). In evaluating various takes on the relationship between the state and civil society in Turkey since the 1999 earthquake, depending on the field examined and the time period, many factors seem to differ depending on which author is read (Jacoby & Özerdem 2011; Johnson 2011; Kübicek 2002; Jalali 2002). One common thread that runs through the analyses previously cited is the way in which the 1999 Marmara earthquake hurt public perception of the Turkish state due to the inadequacy of its response, and that civil society organizations stepped up in the wake of the disaster to provide services that the state had not. Moreover, within a few years of the 1999 earthquakes, civil society was in general weakened in power vis-a-vis the state for various reasons - among them opposition by the state (Kübicek 2002; Johnson 2011; Jacoby & Özerdem 2010). These studies also pointed out, though, that the state did provide

support at that time to some civil society organizations, namely those that were close in aims and ideology to the state (Johnson 2011; Jacoby & Özerdem 2008).

Another factor upon which many of these studies were in agreement about was that groups that supported Kemalism, the military and/or secularism were more favored by the state. The timing of their studies is therefore important, since most were studying the 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s. Islamist and left-wing groups were the ones given less priority or were in an oppositional relation to the state of the time (Jalali 2002, 128; Johnson 2011, 426). For this reason, it is crucial to note how drastically political favor and ideology has changed within Turkey in the past few years, even since the early 2000s. For one, since the ruling party is based on conservatism and Islam, the civil society organizations on the "outside" are now the secularist or Kemalist-leaning organizations. For instance, while the civil society search and rescue organization AKUT was the favorite of the state in the 1990s, in the past year its former head resigned from his post after heavy political pressure due to his criticism of the ruling party during a television broadcast (Jacoby & Özerdem 2008, 306; Hürriyet Daily News). It is important to note that in my research, I only spoke to people in organizations with generally secular backgrounds; I did not do fieldwork with any conservative or religious-based groups. Speaking to groups of wider political backgrounds would have enhanced my understanding of different political groups' current relation to the state, and it would definitely compose the next step in a continuation of this research. However, speaking to the secularist groups that I did showed a currently strained relationship between these organizations and the state.

For instance, one of my interviewees who is connected to a civil society organization generally termed to be on the left of the political spectrum said this: "We keep trying as what we can do, but I'm not sure if it's working, you know. Because day by day we are getting ignored by the [government] institutions." Another interviewee, when I asked him if the government was listening to the recommendations that his group made about how to change the current preparation efforts, simply laughed in response to my question. He went on to say that this was a problem for Istanbul's preparations, since many recommendations from civil society organizations were being ignored by the relevant government

institutions. Another interviewee who worked for an organization that has been termed more secular complained about not only being ignored, but about having funds blocked and taken away from their group due to their political stance.

In general, the groups that give earthquake education trainings to members of the public were often civil society organizations (as opposed to the state handling this alone). This shows that civil society is still taking up this part of the responsibility of spreading awareness and education about the dangers of an earthquake and what Istanbul residents can do. They continued this work despite being ignored or blocked by the government due to their political stance.

While my interviewees only noted anecdotes from their own organizations, it is the case that as of November 2016, 1,495 non-governmental organizations had been shut down by the government. This was done in the context of the state of emergency that has been implemented in Turkey since the coup that was attempted in July 2016 (Çetingüleç 2016). Since the articles I cited on the condition of civil society disaster preparation groups in Istanbul have been published, the political field has both changed drastically in terms of which groups are favored and which ones face an adversarial relationship with the state in general. This political instability in general most likely makes it difficult for groups of any political position to build and expand their efforts, since the political conditions determine how much support or resistance they may receive from the state, and this may change at any given time. In addition, one of my interviewees noted that this political instability affected his group's work due to the increased suspicion and polarization that it caused amongst possible recipients of the organization.

In this manner, the civil society participants I spoke with whose efforts were being ignored or blocked, or whose programs were being hurt by general political instability, expressed frustration or anger about this situation. As noted, one interviewee was unsure whether his group's work was in vain or not due to being ignored by the relevant "decision makers" in the process of preparing the city.

As noted, while my research included mainly secular-leaning organizations, the opposition they reported seemed to be in line with the findings of Schäfers and Tamer that the formation of the agency AFAD under the direction of the Presidency has served to streamline and consolidate state power when it comes to the management of disasters like earthquakes. As shown by Schäfers in her study of aid given by AFAD after the 2011 Van earthquake, AFAD attempted to control the dynamics of who could and could not receive aid based on a number of factors, including organization, whether one rented or owned their home, and whether or not there was a male head of household (Schäfers 2014, Tamer n.d.). According to her review of the response by AFAD to the Van earthquake, the Soma mining disaster, and the influx of refugees into Suruç from Syria, AFAD has consistently taken up a hegemonic position in post-disaster relief, whether by explicitly pushing out civil society organizations in the cases of Van and Suruç or by disseminating a hegemonic narrative about the events as in the case of Soma (Tamer 2017). This would account for the comments made by my interviewees that they were feeling as though their role was being diminished and that it was increasingly difficult to work in the field as a civil society institution. What's more, during interviews some of the disaster response professionals I spoke to specifically mentioned this dynamic with AFAD, where their organization was suppressed in comparison to the prioritization of AFAD by the state. Thus, tracing the research from the post-1999 earthquake era to the more recent research since AFAD was founded in 2009, it seems that while the state has taken on the responsibility for the post-earthquake response in name, civil society organizations have been left out of this process in a significant manner.

2.3. Scientists and the Negotiation of Responsibility

When it came to the scientists and academics I spoke to, a key theme I encountered in my discussions with them was the idea that too much responsibility was being placed on them concerning the earthquake situation when it should instead be distributed to other actors. As a group who was assumed to hold key information about this threat, the interviewees who worked specifically on the science of earthquakes in some form or fashion occupied a key role in terms of providing information about this risk that would then inform both the

public and government policies. As such, many of them had been called on at some point in their career to speak to the media about the level of risk of a future earthquake in Istanbul. In this section, I argue that while the interviewees I spoke with fought against a displacement of responsibility solely to their shoulders (through the demand for a predicted "date" for the earthquake that preparation would then be based around), they also crafted a narrative about the probability and time frame of a possible earthquake in a way that informed the public about the limits of scientific knowledge just as it encouraged constant preparation in the city. At the same time, it seems that they also negotiated their position vis-a-vis state institutions in terms of what information they shared about a possible future earthquake. I also show how the scientists I spoke with enforced disciplinary boundaries against other researchers who have made predictions about when the earthquake will come in the Turkey-based and Istanbul-based media environments.

Through the distribution of their comments to the media and the way their role as scientists was seen as authoritative in society, my research participants who specialized in earthquake science seemed very cautious and strategic about what statements they made to the media. For instance, when we discussed which areas of the city might be more vulnerable in an earthquake, Yavuz replied that he cannot use the names of specific districts when he is asked such a question by a reporter because it can cause "speculation." He went on to say that he "gives some hints to people" - mentioning just various factors like distance from the faultline and soil quality. He gave the example of what would happen if he stated that, for instance, the northern neighborhood of Sarıyer was safe: Perhaps the soil quality and land under Sarıyer is "safe," but they cannot be sure about the building quality. For this reason, he "cannot say anything." This reply seemed to speak both to the way the media could cause an exaggerated reaction with the names of specific neighborhoods, and also how risk cannot be certain even in areas far from the faultline and with high-value housing. At the same time, the question may be raised as to whether Yavuz also did not want to cause "speculation" because precise predictions could affect the value of certain neighborhoods in terms of the real estate market. In turn, since there are close ties between land owners, construction companies, and the state, and since some scientists and academics have already been subjected to political pressure for making public statements that run against

the interests of the current government, he may have wanted to avoid precise predictions for certain areas for these reasons as well (Tamer 2017). As also noted by Tamer, due to the "fetish" for development currently at hand in terms of the approach to Istanbul city planning, it would conceivably run against the state's interests if certain neighborhoods were devalued or overvalued depending on their construction plans (Tamer 2017).

In addition, scientists I spoke with also criticized the pressure by the media to find a "date" for a possible future earthquake. For instance, Yavuz asserted that they as scientists are constantly asked by the media about "when" the earthquake will be, despite their repeated assertions that it cannot be predicted. He criticized those scientists who say "there will be no earthquake until 2045," saying that their comments are not "meaningful." Yavuz stated that it was very important to emphasize that the earthquake can potentially occur at any time, because if "you say that there will be no earthquake until 2045, it means for the normal people and the decision makers, you can *sleep* until 2044."

This particular situation in which earthquake scientists are confronted with demands for "prediction" was covered in the 2017 study conducted by Joffe et al. with earthquake scientists based mainly in the UK. The study was conducted to assess how the idea of prediction was understood and related to emotionally by scientists, especially in light of Italian scientists having been held legally responsible for their statements about the level of earthquake risk before the 2009 L'Aquila earthquake that struck and killed hundreds of people. While the conviction was eventually overturned, it has caused discussion within the scientific community about the nature of communicating risk and uncertainty to the public, and has moved scientists away from attempting earthquake "prediction" in general (Benessia & De Marchi 2017; Joffe et al. 2017). In the wake of this, Joffe et al. consider how earthquake prediction was popular for many decades in the late part of the 20th century, but after a string of high-profile failures in prediction, it quickly became a form of stigmatized research within the earthquake science community. Their article focuses on the ways in which science is not only guided by rationality but also group dynamics and the "dynamic interplay of cultural assumptions, emotion and social influence" in constructing boundaries and notions of stigmatized research topics, namely that an emotional and social

barrier against certain types of research is constructed around the idea of "stigma." This demonstrates how scientific research is not guided by completely "rational" research questions but also by social dynamics and researchers' emotional relationships to topics. Importantly, many of the comments and patterns that the researchers found for the U.K.-based earthquake scientists were also espoused by my interviewees.

In addition, Joffe et al. also observe the same tension that exists in Turkey between scientists and media in their own research in the UK, namely the "tension between the scientific dismissal of earthquake prediction and public interest and demand in it" (2017). For instance, Yavuz said saw a danger in giving specific time periods because their words as scientists would justify reduced preparation efforts by other actors. This was similar to Joffe et al.'s interviewees, many of whom stated that earthquake prediction is harmful because it takes the focus away from "creating resilient structures, which participants saw as the more pressing objective" (2017). Not only Yavuz but also several other professionals in my research emphasized that the next big earthquake can come at "anytime" or "tomorrow." For more than one professional I spoke with, these phrases almost seemed rehearsed, like they repeated them often. At the same time, more than one interviewee emphasized that they are not the "decision makers" in this situation, just as Yavuz expressed in the previous quote. I also interpreted this as a type of push-back to the responsibility placed on them, especially by the media, to offer guidance about what should be done in regards to the earthquake threat. By saying "decision makers" or "lawmakers," besides several of them saying explicitly that it is now "the time for the decision makers [to act]," they highlighted through their word choice that they themselves were not the ones able to make decisions or make sweeping changes concerning these issues. They thus positioned themselves as public figures, but as figures that can only offer advice and knowledge from research; as noted previously, this may have also been a subtle message about their position in the preparation ecosystem vis-a-vis state institutions such as the greater municipality or country-wide institutions like AFAD that have executive power concerning these issues.

At the same time, these scientists had to strategically offer a narrative not that there was no earthquake threat at all (which would move *too* far away from prediction) but also that there is no way to predict a certain date with any reliability. By emphasizing that it can happen "anytime" or "tomorrow" just as it could possibly happen in 40 years, these interviewees kept the focus on the resilience of buildings through "forecasting" instead of "prediction," since prediction is understood to be associated with shorter time windows while forecasting is more long-term. With forecasting, as Joffe et al. point out, not only do scientists avoid being "wrong," which can be dangerous if there are too many false alarms through prediction and the public becomes immune to the warning, but the focus is kept on the idea that, no matter what, the earthquake will come at some point, and in fact it could be very soon. Thus, the earthquake scientists express what they understand from the probability of an earthquake occurring and at what general magnitude, just as they make sure to offer a narrative that leaves space for keeping "decision makers" accountable for their role in preparation. Joffe et al., in the conclusion of their article, encourage scientists to navigate this situation in the exact way that most of my interviewees spoke about the possibility: that it is important to "constantly maintain preparedness" even as scientists offer comments that downplay predictions made concerning exact years that may lack scientific credibility.

As such, forecasting also seemed to be a reaction to the general environment in the Turkish media over many years past in which some scientists tell the news media contradictory claims about when, where and how a possible future earthquake may occur. Yavuz stated that media representatives had called him in the past to ask his opinion about the controversial claims made by other scientists; he told me that he responded by saying he can only comment on their claims after seeing their scientific methods and results. When I asked Vedat about the reports that could be seen from time to time saying that the earthquake will happen within a certain small time period, he dismissed the people who made those predictions as scientific frauds. He stated that they only speak to the media because they would be laughed at in scientific meetings: they have no "real record" of "scientific research," and they are most likely going on TV and making such predictions for "publicity" and money. Through these responses, I read my interviewees as once again

reacting to the pressure placed on them as scientists to provide accurate and reliable information about this threat; this required not only speaking for themselves but also differentiating themselves from others in the scientific community. Joffe et al. also found that their interviewees made a large distinction between scientists who engaged in prediction research versus those who did not; they show that calling people who engage in prediction fraudulent or "nuts" is a form of boundary work:

> "...to maintain scientific authority, scientists routinely 'police the boundaries' between the scientific and the unscientific, attempting to stave off the intrusion of anything that may undermine its reputation. … A clear boundary was drawn between the 'nut' who pursued earthquake prediction, and the reasonable scientist who recognized the folly of this aim." (2017)

By highlighting that such boundary work was not emotionally neutral but in fact based on adding a sense of social stigma to the type of research they were trying to distance themselves from, Joffe et al. show that earthquake research is also about the steps taken by scientists to maintain their reputation as experts and "reputable" scientists through the domain of emotion as well.

This point about boundary-work between scientists who engage in forecasting versus those who engage in prediction may be especially pertinent in the Turkish media environment. For example, Vedat referenced my status as American and noted that the Turkish media is not like the US media in that a specialist with an educational background in science is assigned as a science editor at many outlets. Instead, journalists that report on scientific issues in Turkey are just "ordinary" or "the main type of reporters," who are more focused on a "sensational" story, as he put it. Here he was emphasizing that the media also could not differentiate between prediction and forecasting, and that scientists who were fraudulent (in his eyes) may not be able to be determined. However, it is also the case that there is a high level of media sensationalism concerning the earthquake risk level for Istanbul, and as my interviewees mention, they are asked to comment on the predictions of scientists who say things such as "the earthquake will come in 2045" or "the earthquake will never hit Istanbul." Thus, the scientists I spoke with performed this boundary work often, not only in my interview as they discussed these topics but also in their comments to the media. This

may be more prominent, as Vedat suggested, in Turkey as compared to the UK or US as standards for media may differ.

Overall, it seems to be the case that the scientists I interviewed performed boundary work to keep their own legitimacy as compared to other researchers just as they seemed to do this to keep their voice in the media about the results of their research. Simultaneously, as scientists who were also residents of Istanbul, they may have made sure to make scientific boundaries clear, while keeping the focus on preparation and action, due to their own stake in the future of the city. For instance, in the case of Yavuz, he later spoke to me in our interview about the worry he felt for his mother's apartment, since he thought it was not safe enough in the event of an earthquake. This once again shows how researchers working on the issue of an earthquake in a different region or country may approach their work differently than the experts I spoke with, since they were simultaneously residents of the city as well.

As one of Joffe et al.'s interviewees stated, as earthquake scientists they took their job very seriously because the information they provide will be passed on to the government and to the relevant social and political bodies. It was clear that my interviewees also took their role seriously in that they were able to craft and disseminate a narrative that both highlighted the inability to predict a certain year in which an earthquake would strike, while nevertheless making sure to state that an earthquake around 7.0 magnitude has a high likelihood of striking within the coming decades, and it will most likely greatly affect Istanbul. In the political context of Istanbul and Turkey, the scientists may have also been reacting to the encroachment of the state into the disaster planning process as mentioned by Schäfers and Tamer as well: as demonstrated in past recent disasters, non-governmental bodies such as civil society organizations and aid organizations have been put under pressure by the state, whether that be in their actions or public statements; as such, the form of neoliberalism I describe in this thesis is both based around disaster as well as an illiberal state that sometimes exerts control over academic and non-governmental bodies (Tamer n.d., Schäfers 2014, 2016). In this context, experts in this form of disaster neoliberalism needed to carefully strategize their public comments in light of influence from several different

parts of the Istanbul population, such as the media and the state, just as they needed to weigh their influence on individuals and state disaster management at the same time. As such they can be characterized as being under pressure but as noted in my interview comments, they negotiated this position a nuanced manner, just as UK scientists did in the Joffe et al. 2017 study, despite being in a more complicated and conflicted media and political environment than the scientists in the UK study.

As I discuss in the beginning of Chapter 4, "risk" has been used in many senses, one predominant one being the way in which risk is made profitable. In this case, the scientists I spoke with did not seem to profit besides holding their paid positions. Instead, they took on the responsibility as Istanbul-based scientists to whom many questions were asked about the earthquake and crafted a strategic narrative that both fulfilled their duty as public intellectuals just as it resisted the push to place full responsibility on the scientific community for the earthquake situation. In doing this, they put focus back on other actors such as civil society, but also on the state, whose presence in the realm of disaster management was being felt even more strongly since the introduction of AFAD in 2009 (Tamer 2017) They also worked against sensational predictions, which often create a short-term sense of panic without accompanying information about how to prepare or what residents can do, and against sensationalism in the media in general. In this sense, the scientists I spoke with did a small part in helping to combat inaction within the city's preparation efforts.

2.4. Centralization of the State under Neoliberalism

As discussed through the previous sections, the state has played a role in the actions of individuals and within civil society. This approach has been neoliberal in its partnership with capital and in its lack of support to individual citizens (much less non-citizens) regarding risk reduction. By ostracizing civil society groups that do not line up with the dominant politics of the party in power, the local and state governments hinder a section of organized society that would contribute to the earthquake preparations in the city.

One major observation about the role of the state in disaster preparation and risk reduction is its scale. For example, one interviewee, Dilek, said as much speaking about Turkey as a whole: "The key is government, governmental level. Because if you are talking about 80 million [the estimated population of Turkey as a country], then you have to be, you have to be top authority to do everything." Whereas civil society can only organize among themselves, the state also holds political authority, control of the criminal justice system, and the ability to regulate industries, all of which are not qualities of other relevant actors in the earthquake preparation field. They thus have a large role to play simply by being the largest actor and the actor with the most authority on this issue. However, as mentioned, one of the main and only laws concerning disaster preparation seems to benefit the construction industry and some property owners while marginalizing and de-possessing residents of their homes if they do not have legal ownership.

It is intriguing that the particular combination of disaster preparedness, economy and the state have developed the way they have in Turkey, however, since a country with some similar elements, Sri Lanka, has a different combination of emphases in disaster preparation. Also a country vulnerable to a large future disaster and having suffered it own major disaster around 10-15 years ago (the 2004 tsunami that killed over 35,000), and also having a nationalistic and militaristic political environment, Sri Lanka's government has paired together the ideas of disaster preparedness and nationalism through an idea of "securing" the nation against both disaster and terrorism (Choi 2015, 290). In Turkey, in general there is no rhetoric from the state that addresses the people as a whole and says that the nation must bind together in order to *prepare* for a possible earthquake, and they do not connect internal war efforts to disaster preparation as is done in Sri Lanka (Choi 2015). As demonstrated in the research done by Sumru Tamer, disasters are transformed into a national matter *after* they occur, not before: as she shows through the cases of the mine at Soma, which was sold to a private company and whose safety was not properly regulated, the state appeared on the scene in order to transform and manage the disaster as a scene of national mourning, not as one of state failure or as a "work murder" as it was labelled by the families of many miners killed (Tamer 2017). Moreover, in her work Tamer demonstrates that the particular form of nationalism displayed was about allegiance to a

"caring" state that "loved" its citizens, but only the citizens who also returned that "love" and who did not protest or criticize its response. Thus Choi's usage of "disaster nationalism" seems to relate in the sense that the Turkish state also reacted with a push for "national unity," but one that was not so much focused on pre-disaster, but on controlling the post-disaster environment both in who could participate - since civil society organizations and even individuals were blocked in the cases of Van, Suruç and Soma - and what the narrative about the event would be in the national media (Tamer 2017).

At the same time, Tamer's thesis is also very useful in contextualizing the role of AFAD in earthquake preparation. Since 2009, AFAD, in its consolidation of three other former government agencies, has been the main body through which the state has arranged its disaster preparation methods. Also as mentioned by Tamer, AFAD has published reports that promote itself as successful and strong in terms of what it is doing for disaster preparation in Istanbul (such as in the "National Earthquake and Strategy Plan 2012-2023" which outlines many goals but does not seem to have produced the urban planning risk reduction plans needed), but reactions from individuals and civil society differ when it comes to its actions "on the ground" (Tamer 2017). AFAD is indeed the institution that touts itself as having a central and top position in terms of disaster preparedness, since it operates under the office of the Presidency, and thus it operates on a national and even international level in terms of scale. However, with this being said, as in Tamer's research, AFAD's work, while partial, has left gaps in terms of pushing out some civil society organizations and monopolizing who can contribute in disaster preparation for a coming earthquake.

Since the disaster preparation efforts before the earthquake occurs are not so much approached in a national perspective, like in Choi's research on Sri Lanka, but in terms of post-disaster management, and since preparations are largely based on neoliberal developmentalism, for this thesis a more useful term may be "disaster neoliberalism" as opposed to "disaster nationalism." Looking at the short-term history of the government's approach, Gibson and Göksin point out that while the state developed reasonable plans for earthquake-focused risk reduction projects after the 1999 earthquake, "a rapidly growing

economy, faltering EU harmonization and a second term for an increasingly pro-development government" meant that the state increasingly turned to destructive gentrification policies starting in 2005 to aid the economy and their image (2016). This push after the earthquake struck in 1999 was also important because the state received intense criticism not only due to its inadequate response, but for allowing the construction of so many poorly made buildings; during the Marmara event, many newly-constructed buildings fell, including state buildings like schools (Jacoby & Özerdem 2008, 302-3). According to my interviewee, while government workers checked buildings before the 1999 earthquake, this has now been changed to legally allow private companies to carry out checks as to whether design and construction of buildings is according to code. This is one reason why corruption has been criticized within the context of the Turkish construction industry and earthquake preparation (Green 2005; Gunduz & Önder 2013; Doig 2010). This creates an state of core uncertainty in terms of which buildings are truly safe, since even new buildings may not be safe if they are not built according to the updated legal building codes.

Moreover, this collusion between the state and capital that defines the "disaster neoliberalism" approach may also partially account for why there has not been a new earthquake masterplan for the city since 2004, despite ambitious goals outlined in some of AFAD's documents on disaster management. Despite the construction of a third bridge, several new metro lines, and two underwater transportation tunnels since 2009, the master plan for the city has not been updated, even though even the 2009 master plan did not include the recommendations from the 2004 earthquake plan. In addition, even though they are common in other high-risk cities, no comprehensive disaster risk reduction plan has been produced for Istanbul. In 2002, the Turkish government invited the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to produce a report about earthquake risk levels in the city, but they have since not been invited back despite major construction projects and sealine changes. One interpretation of this lack may be due to the idea that creating and following a risk reduction plan would run counter to the profit logic of neoliberalism. As pointed out by Gibson & Göksin and Angell, the urban transformation projects that have been carried out are not in the areas most in need of assistance due to unsafety in an

earthquake (2016, 2014). Instead, projects are often criticized as being based on how lucrative they may be in terms of "rant" (or unearned income from development). At the same time, it is important to note that due to a lack of city-wide studies since the JICA study, the level of risk for various neighborhoods and areas is unclear or in the very least, difficult to easily ascertain for the average resident. Additionally, while AFAD has planned studies about the level of risk and while it states that it is now focused on risk management, it seems that this arm of the state has not produced the plans mentioned.

In fact, Istanbul's urban transformation as a phenomenon is not always touted as a solution to earthquake preparation; in many cases the earthquake threat is not even mentioned as reasoning for large-scale construction projects. For the ongoing Tarlabaşı 360 urban renewal project, earthquake safety - whether that the existing houses are unsafe or that the new houses will be safer - is barely mentioned in the promotional material for the project. The Tarlabaşı project was authorized around re-building the neighborhood due to its historical status, but at the same time, apartments such as the Tarlabaşı 360 building project promote gentrification by destroying the old homes and building expensive apartments in their place. For many such building projects, there is an embedded sense of anticipation as described by Adams et al. in their article about various functions and qualities of "anticipation" in the current moment. Commenting on how some affects of anticipation "[work] outwardly into multiple sites," they say: "Promissory capital speculation and development logics render some places as backwards in time, needing anticipatory investment, while other places are deemed already at the cusp of the 'new' future, marked by the virtue of rapid change" (2009, 251). Such omissions of the topic of earthquake safety - when they may even be relevant for very old neighborhoods like Tarlabaşı where buildings sometimes collapse on their own without any earthquake movement - belie the most pressing reason for urban transformation, mainly the acquisition of wealth for the representatives of the state-capital partnership. At the same time, such urban transformation projects utilize a narrative of speed, modernity, and moving towards a "new" future through gentrification and renewal. The excitement that is conjured around such a vision of a future based on development seems to contrast with the possible future of the large-scale earthquake; it is missing in many of these gentrification projects, even in their promotional

materials. The affect of looming danger that the earthquake represents clashes with the visions of prosperity, growth and modernity that projects like Tarlabaşı 360 advertise.

2.4.1. Effects and Implications

Marlene Schäfers, in her analysis of the 2011 Van earthquake and the response by the state, analyzes the rhetoric of state officials and shows how the state contradicts itself as to the safety of the buildings post-earthquake. At first, they say that they can only assess current damage to the buildings through inspections, then than ones that are less than "heavily damaged" can be re-entered - thus making a claim about their future safety as well (2016, 237-8). In essence, she shows how the state avoided responsibility not only for the initial earthquake but also its aftershocks (through their announcement that people could move back into buildings, after which 39 people died in the aftershocks) by claiming that the situation was beyond their responsibility as it was a "natural" event (2016, 238). She details the way in which the state contradicts itself and fails to follow logic in its explanations for its own processes. This seems to be one example in which the Turkish state has failed to take responsibility for its own actions concerning earthquake preparation and response. In Istanbul today, while AFAD exists as the main governmental body, its presence does not seem to be widely felt in terms of specific information about neighborhood risk levels, comprehensive risk reduction plans, or wide-scale public outreach on this issue; since AFAD exists and takes up a large amount of official "space" in opposition to civil society organizations, but since they seem to be less effective in their output than promised, this seems to also create disempowerment among individuals. This goes hand in hand with the lack of information about the risk level for various buildings, neighborhoods, and regions. This dearth of information results in uncertainty about how risky various parts of the city are, which in turn prevents political organization around demands for safer housing or earthquake meeting points. As stated, the central government, through AFAD and other means, has also hindered sections of civil society based on their political alignment, and under the state of emergency especially, this has led to thousands of associations being closed. The groups closed were organizations of many different types and purposes, but such actions, among others, have led to the particular style of government to be deemed

oppressive and as following "authoritarian patterns of government" (Akçalı & Korkut 2015; Günay & Dzihic 2016; Eraydin & Taşan-Kok 2013). Several interviewees who gave political critiques about the current political environment also asserted that there was corruption in the building industry just as they said that the state is oppressive towards dissenting voices and opposition politics.

Returning again to the points emphasized by Tamer and Schäfers, it seems that the state, through AFAD, seemingly suppresses other non-governmental actors while trying to monopolize pre-disaster preparations. At the same time, many interviewees said that AFAD was not effectively taking part in pre-disaster activities - whether that was corruption in the retrofitting process, corruption in educational activities for neighborhoods, or corruption in terms of having programs existing only "on paper" and not on the ground - the state seems to be working to restructure the disaster preparation field. Through this AFAD monopolization, the current field is changing in terms of who could participate if the earthquake struck soon, and how they could participate. As it stands, the earthquake preparations may be seen as a continuum, where the state's response to other disasters such as Soma and Van can be seen as foreshadowing to how it may respond to a large Istanbul disaster. While the state was cited by many sources as being unprepared and slow following the 1999 earthquake, in the last decade since AFAD's construction, even though it was still cited as being slow, it can be seen to have exerted more illiberal control over which civil society organizations can operate, even using violence and the police to enforce these goals as in the case of Suruç (Tamer 2017).

Seen in this light, Naomi Klein's thesis of "disaster capitalism," as explored in the cases of post-war Iraq and post-Katrina New Orleans, among others, may be relevant as a guide to the current state of the disaster management environment in Istanbul. As also outlined by Tamer, it is crucial to take note of the links between private companies and the state, since these would most likely be the companies favored for post-disaster reconstruction contracts (n.d.). According to Klein, disasters create voids in the realm of economics and politics that allow the state and private companies to come in and restructure the areas affected by disasters while ordinary citizens and local civil society organizations are still reeling from

the effects of the disaster. She sees private capital not only as a partner to the state in this kind of process but as something that is aimed to replace the state: “This [disaster-capitalism] complex is not satisfied merely to feed off the state, the way traditional military contractors do; it aims, ultimately, to replace core functions of government with its own profitable enterprises, as it did in Baghdad's Green Zone” (Klein 2007, 50). While it is not clear what the exact balance of state bodies to private enterprises may result after a large Istanbul disaster, Klein’s point highlights the way in which less powerful actors like civil society organizations are potentially more powerless after a large disaster due to their smaller structure pre-disaster. And while many non-governmental agencies took the opportunity to grow and build their organizations in the wake of the 1999 earthquake, after which the state response was slow, due to the formation of AFAD and its previous examples of post-disaster control, it seems that the current field has become more subject to control by AFAD as a centralized state institution. The structure of the state thus seems to have changed since 1999 in terms of how disasters have been managed in the last several years and how disasters are currently being prepared for (Tamer 2017).

As for the overall landscape, the mode of “disaster neoliberalism” seems to often shift the responsibility for preparation onto individuals regardless of their financial means, and it refuses to work cooperatively with all civil society organizations, opting instead to politicize the preparation efforts by non-governmental groups and prioritize those with ideological alignment. Both of these factors are ways in which the Turkish government, through AFAD and at various levels, contributed to an environment in which many people did not prepare for the earthquake. In the middle of these various actors, the scientists I interviewed also negotiated the burden of responsibility that was sometimes placed on them to provide “answers” about the nature of the risk, but through their narrative they made sure to emphasize the importance of focusing on comprehensive disaster risk reduction. While the state has made some efforts in the way of getting the city ready through AFAD and other mechanisms, the strategy of “preparation through urban transformation” seems to have left large portions of the city at risk despite the state’s possible post-disaster plans.

Chapter 3

Humor as a Response to Risk

For all natural disasters, it impossible to clearly state the level of risk that may be at play for particular cities or areas. For one, there are variables to all weather and earthquake events that cannot be exactly predicted; groups can only forecast various scenarios based on different possible factors. For earthquakes, as discussed, their exact timing cannot be said for sure, except for some phenomena such as aftershocks occurring after a large earthquake event. Furthermore, earthquakes in particular are very much predicated on the type of physical structures people have built, thus making them especially dangerous for compactly-built urban areas. Without knowing about the status of the buildings and infrastructure, the general level of earthquake risk for cities cannot be clearly known. Earthquakes are unpredictable events and are thus inherently uncertain, and at the same time, due to some factors outlined in the previous chapter such as a lack of a recent city-wide survey, the earthquake risk situation in Istanbul is especially uncertain.

At the same time, many of my interviewees spoke about political problems they faced, and they discussed the risks and limits of the current political situation. Thus the concepts of facing physical risk from the earthquake itself sometimes coincided with commentary about living with political risk in an environment that was both politically uncertain and potentially oppressive to those who did not have the favor of the current government. Since some of my interviewees expressed such views, the concept of physical risk and political risk seemed to overlap and result in an environment that contained uncertainty in multiple domains of life as an Istanbul resident. In this chapter, I discuss humor and laughter as a reaction to this uncertain situation. Laughter and deliberate humor often overlapped in my interviews, and in this chapter I evaluate both. Especially in terms of how this humourous response may be interpreted politically, I refer to three sources based on ethnography that concerns the political dimensions of humor and laughter: Susanna Trnka's 2011 work on the Indo-Fijian response to the 2000 coup, Victoria Bernal's 2013 article about Ethiopians'

responses to political repression, and Yael Navaro-Yashin's 2002 book on the role of humor, rumor and cynicism in mid-90's Istanbul.

3.1. Humor as a Response to Both Physical and Political Risk

When reflecting on the interviews I conducted as a whole, I realized that almost every interview contained some sort of humor or laughter. This can partially be explained by my own methodological approach, as many times I encouraged a light-hearted or joking atmosphere in the interviews: if my interviewees made a joke I laughed with them, and on one or two instances I made my own jokes with them after they made a joke as well. Since one of the functions of humor is bonding, this was one way in which I attempted to go along with the atmosphere that was being created by my interviewees, or to make my interviewees feel more comfortable. Upon listening to my interview recordings, I also realized that I laughed nervously specifically when the idea of the earthquake happening very soon was discussed.

However, despite this approach on my part, the amount of jokes or laughter in my interview seemed striking. In her article about the response of the Indo-Fijian community following the 2000 coup in Fiji, Susanna Trnka questions why humor was the predominant reaction of many people in the community. Referencing the theory that the impetus for laughing and humor comes from "the perception or recognition of incongruity," she states that such a response would be understandable from the discord, confusion and political and social uncertainty that followed the coup (Kuipers 2008, 363). However, she wonders why such a response was common instead of "expressions of fear or despair" or "critical analysis" (Trnka 2011, 339).

Since my interview topic concerned a potentially disastrous event and took place in an uncertain political and physical environment, some parallels exist with Trnka's field in the sense that the environment contained tension, confusion and ambiguity. In the same way, my interviewees often responded with laughter and joking tones when discussing the earthquake threat and the current political situation in Turkey. For instance, I wrote

"laughs" for almost every instance in which I or my interviewee laughed in the interviews; this word appears 375 times in total in my transcriptions. Thus Trnka's question about the prevalence of a humorous response also seems relevant for my field as well, since other emotional expressions like fear, sadness, or anger could have been more dominant.

In her analysis, Trnka says that "joke-work" is about a mastery of control in a situation in which one feels helpless. Trnka references Freud's theories on humor, showing that humor can come as a response to the uncanny, and in Freud's description a sense of uncanniness can itself come from feeling helpless. Despite being a reaction to feeling powerless, however, Trnka posits that joke-work is a type of narrative and emotional construction that demonstrates agency and control through the process of creating the joke itself. In regards to my field, as I will also cover in the fourth chapter, the current environment in Istanbul sometimes leaves few options for people to act, both in regards to the political risk and physical risk. Thus, this explanation of joke creation may be useful to understanding why humor was so common in my interactions in the field.

Another interpretation comes by way of Victoria Bernal, who in her work on the use of humor as a response to Eritrean state politics, states that joking may "open up a way to talk about the unspeakable," and that the shift from "tragic" to "comic" in situations of repression creates an "analytical distance" (2013, 307). In a related fashion, I take humor as opening up an emotional distance from the topic - whether it be the earthquake threat or the current political conditions, it may have been more difficult or not preferable for my interviewees to show strong emotions regarding these topics in the interview setting. Instead, humor and laughter allow one to speak about difficult subjects without a heavy emotional investment or a taxing emotional expression. This may also speak to the performance of being an expert or professional, as emotional regulation and seeming "in control" while being interviewed may have played a role in the general lack of strong emotional expressions.

Relatedly, many scholars of humor also note that jokes and laughter function as a way to relieve tension or strain, or to even function as "catharsis" (Kuipers 2008, 367). Quoting

Mary Douglas, Trnka provides the following except from her work that explains this as a psychological mechanism:

> At all times we are expending energy in monitoring our subconscious so as to ensure that our conscious perceptions come through a filtering control. The joke, because it breaks down the control, gives the monitoring system a holiday, . . . For a moment the unconscious is allowed to bubble up without restraint, hence the sense of enjoyment and freedom. (Douglas 1968, 364; Trnka 2011, 339)

This quote refers to the tension or strain caused by one's own self-monitoring processes, but the idea of relieving tension has also been applied to social processes: for instance, humorous rituals of reversal that poke fun at the powerful act as a "safety valve" to release the strain that accumulates between people or groups across a social hierarchy (Kuipers 2008, 365). In the context of my interviews, I often brought up questions that might recall negative feelings, such as what they imagine the aftermath of a possible earthquake might look like, and we also discussed issues in earthquake preparations as they were brought up that may have sparked frustration, anger, fear, or despair. Responding with humor or laughter may have been a way to sidestep or even replace possible reactions that may have been more negative or more emotional, thus relieving or avoiding tension. This may be something that my interviewees do in their daily lives if they are frequently dealing with and discussing the earthquake threat, and thus it may have served to help understand how the people I interviewed inhabit their job in the sense of daily life, or it may have been something that resulted from our interview setting since I asked many questions directly about the earthquake threat and its implications.

In either case, the usage of humor and laughing as a response seems worthy of review for its significant instances, and its possible interpretations and relevance. I will first consider the responses I received from my interviewees that seemed to pertain to the idea of physical risk, such as what will happen during or after a possible large earthquake, and then in the second section I will evaluate the humor and laughter that pertained more to political conditions. However, since both types of risk were related to one another, the explanations for humor may apply to both forms of risk. In both sections, I will also ask the question of the effect of such humorous reactions on political action: whether responding in a joking manner seemed to help develop political agency or whether it seemed to suppress it.

3.1.1 Responding to the idea of physical risk

When my interviewees spoke about physical risk, humor seemed to function as a way to provide emotional distance and to cope with the tension of discussing situations that may involve possible death or injury. For instance, when I asked Dilek, who worked for a civil society organizations, whether she avoided any areas of the city, she told me that she does limit her time in some buildings that she thinks are not very safe, like some malls or movie theatres:

> "Sometimes you have to accept [the risk]. Because in some cinema salons they don't have proper setting for it. And you have to accept that fact. But I need, I just try to be, let's say, close to the door, when I see somewhere like that, if I can't escape *(laughs)*, so *(laughs)* if something is going to happen, I want to be- *(laughs)*"

I said "yeah," to her in agreement at that point, since we were both laughing and she seemed to be reiterating that she wanted to be somewhere safer, like near a door, in the event of an emergency. Dilek further talked about the need to prioritize making Istanbul buildings safer by demolishing and rebuilding unsafe structures before focusing on training about disaster response. She stated this as a critique of the government's prioritization of post-disaster training, saying: "First of all, [building renewal] needs to be done, and *then* give training to those people. If you just give trainings, then, they will die.. *(laughs)* as a trained person *(laughs a bit but sadly)*."

In her summary about the sociology of humor, Kuipers says that "black or sick humor, for instance in disaster jokes, has often been explained as a way to cope with unpleasant experiences, both individually and collectively, and more generally to distance oneself from negative emotions such as fear, grief, or shame" (2008, 367). In terms of my own personal participation on this topic, I experienced each interview multiple times: first I was physically present in the interview, then I listened to the interview and transcribed it, sometimes listening to or reading certain sections multiple times depending on their significance. In this process, I realized that my reaction as to whether I found something funny changed. I remarked in my notes that while I had laughed nervously at many of the

same things my interviewees laughed about - namely at the immediate threat of dying or the threat of the earthquake happening in the near future - I did not feel the impulse to laugh when I was transcribing or when I was re-reading the transcripts. In fact, I found the sound of my own laughter on the recording a bit jarring and I found myself to be more nervous and fearful about the earthquake threat during the interview than when I was transcribing. I believe that part of this is due to my own level of fear about the earthquake changing back and forth over time, but I also think this difference in emotion hinged on the distance inherent in listening and transcribing. With the added distance of the transcription, instead of laughing or finding something funny and then quickly passing over it to the next point or interview question, I had more time to contemplate and dwell on what was being said. At this time, I discovered that those negative emotions like fear, sadness and anger tended to crop up when listening or re-reading the interviews, as I had more time as well as physical and emotional space to react to the content: namely, that countless people will be in danger if disaster preparation is not dramatically improved.

This anecdote about my research process is small, but it seems to speak to the way in which a humorous response can replace and substitute for more intense negative emotions, or even for "critical analysis" as Trnka noted to be lacking in the emphasis on responding with humor (2011). The short-term relief of laughing about a serious topic in the interview seemed to serve as a stop-gap for the critical reflection that I was able to access more easily in dealing with listening to, typing up and reading the interview content. It follows, then, that this temporary relieving of tension through humor may distract Istanbulites from reflecting more deeply and feeling more intense emotions -- in essence, through confronting these uncertain situations in a more engaged and long-term way that in turn may lend itself more easily to future political action. The phrase "laughing it off" may be apt in describing this particular way in which people who may be affected by the earthquake situation pass over this situation emotionally through the use of humor.

3.1.2. Responding to the Idea of Political Risk

As previously noted, since physical and political risk overlap and reinforce one another in my field, the responses to such risk resemble one another as well. In the context of an environment that has been described as increasingly authoritarian, it seems more and more relevant to discuss how much my interviewees felt in control versus how much they felt immobilized or helpless. Many instances occurred in my research in which "joke-work" seemed to be a reaction when discussing situations that interviewees described as being out of their personal control. I particularly found that the most common time in which my interviewees laughed was when they discussed part of their job, the earthquake preparations, the government or their lives that they could not change. For instance, Hüseyin, who works in a university, said that he was not able to do all the things he wanted to do about earthquake preparation due to his current level of work obligations, saying: "Unfortunately I can't do so many things. I have to do much more. But it's not getting further than talking with my students in lectures, courses, or in some meetings. I - I can do more than this, I *have* to do, but I cannot now. *(laughs)*"

Similarly, Dilek laughed at many different topics that represented limits or blocks as to what can currently be done right now concerning the earthquake preparations. She laughed at the money her organization does not get, at the slow pace of Istanbul's disaster preparations, at the lack of infrastructural support for other areas of Turkey that need earthquake training, and at her organization's lack of ability to make any infrastructural changes to the city (since they only helped in training people for earthquake response, as in the comment cited previously about "dying as a trained person"), among other topics that were similarly about blocks or limits. This seems to speak to Bernal's observation that some experiences of deep disappointment may seem "maudlin or exaggerated" if expressed in direct emotional terms instead of through laughing (2013:307). Speaking about the ways in which Eritreans resist the state through humor, for instance, she explains that humor acts as a way to confront political and tragic truths without facing them head-on: "some circumstances....need to be examined obliquely through the corner of the eye" (2013:307).

Describing Donna Goldstein's ethnography in Rio de Janeiro's shantytowns, Bernal notes that humor in her fieldwork acted as a "response to a moral and legal system that is currently incapable of addressing . . . grievances" and that it is a response to "fear and bewilderment" (Goldstein 2003, 272; Bernal 2013, 301). Two of my interviewees offered critiques of the state both directly and through humor. Fear and bewilderment most likely factored into some interviews, but in the case of the two people who used satire, one person made these jokes alongside showing anger at how the earthquake preparations were being handled by the state and by the current party. He mocked the notion that other countries were "jealous" of Turkey by pointing out that other countries are conducting space missions and advancing in topics such as stem cell research. Another interviewee whose jokes accompanied critiques of the state said the following about how he believes that the park near where we met would be built over at some point for real estate development:

> Osman: So they will come here for a hotel. Because park means- park costs you money. But you need to earn money, you know?
> Laura: *(laughs a bit)* Yeah, exactly.
> Osman: Uh, you will profit- so, sell it! To where, I don't know, some company *(laughs shortly)*. People will uh, resist, probably, and they'll get detained, charged as a terrorist, *(I laugh)* because they're defending the land, like happened in Gezi Park protests.

In both interviews in which such humorous remarks were made, my laughter signaled my agreement with the essential logic of the joke, and as such it had a cohesive function, one that Bernal notes is important under politically oppressive environments, since "getting the joke" indicates a shared history and knowledge of the political circumstances and one's position within them (2013, 307).

Finally, since humor is often linked to recognizing incongruities or breaks in logic, it seems especially fitting for oppressive and neoliberal environments in which conditions of bureaucracy, inequality, and corruption created illogical or confusing systems. For example, one interviewee who generally tried to portray the earthquake preparations as going okay explained the entire process of auditing and checking building designs and construction before I brought up the flaw in this system; namely, that the people

responsible for overseeing the design and construction can be directly related to the company and can be unqualified:

> Filiz: So. Yeah. The application [of the building construction] should be the same with, with the [building] plans.
> Laura: Right. So originally, this is the ideal case. But these inspection firms, private inspection firms, are opened by... the owners of the construction firms. *(we both laugh)*

This interviewee later stated that since this flaw exists, she finds the process "meaningless." In trying to understand why laughter and joking was so popular after the Fijian coup on the part of the ethnic group that was most under threat, Trnka states that by invoking humor and laughter, one actually refers back to an essential orderliness: the joke itself may construct a sense of respite, relief, or "liberation" from narrative order and rules, but at "the conclusion of the joke, … there is a return to a sense of orderliness" (2011, 341). In situations of disorder and incongruity, "jokes not only push beyond existing social norms but also, in doing so, implicitly suggest that such a set of relations exist and that there are limits to how incongruous life can be" (2011, 341). By laughing together at the "meaningless[ness]" of an entire system designed to audit construction without an objective, outside auditor, such a joke may have helped to remind us that we do, as observers of this system, understand this logic as flawed and inherently contradictory. This is especially relevant in political environments in which a state "produces dominant discourses that overdetermine representations of reality" (Bernal 2013, 304) and as such, these jokes once again create a sense of solidarity and in-group feeling among those who fail to accept the logic of these processes enacted by the government.

The topic of whether humor can serve as an effective strategy or type of response against oppressive conditions has been debated within the literature on humor and its effects. Kuipers describes satirical jokes against the government under oppressive regimes as having the purpose of "boosting morale" amongst those who make the joke, and also possibly having an effect against the powerful group that is the target of the humor. However, one important distinction in the cases she covers seems to be whether such jokes can be public or whether they are "whispered" (2008, 368-9). Unfortunately, most of the jokes in my interviews seemed to be made with the assurance that all my interviewees

would be completely anonymous, and in my field there seems to be a decrease in the amount of public jokes that are made about the political system, even though some jokes and forms of satire are present, especially online. Thus this lack of widespread satirical humor about politics seemed to indicate that such jokes were not currently being made in a way that disrupted the political order, but rather seemed to be cowed by it, at least partially. This also seemed to also be a comment on how effective this type of joking and humor can be in making change, especially since humor may allow Istanbul residents to "laugh off" uncomfortable realities.

Another possible interpretation of the use of humor and laughter covered here comes by the way of anthropologist Yael Navaro-Yashin, whose book *Faces of the State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey* was written based on fieldwork conducted in the mid-1990s in Istanbul. While two decades have passed since the era written about in the book transpired, her observations first about humor and rumor on the part of Istanbul secularists may be useful as well as her observations about cynicism as a dominant mode of relationship to the state. Concerning her argument about humor and rumor, in the book Navaro-Yashin shows how humorous texts and exaggerated jokes circulated after the victory of the Welfare Party in Istanbul, whose win was both unexpected and feared by securists, who were panicked about how their secular lifestyle might change after the electoral win. Quoting Walter Benjamin, Navaro-Yashin states that "the domain of humor and rumor reflects discursive knowledge in the form of 'flashes' [per Walter Benjamin] … the jokes and the gossip are like glimpses of 'memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger" (2002, 23). Such a domain is important for anthropological analysis because "humor and rumor reveal an unconscious precipitation of remembered discursive form in the present" (23).

In one exchange I had with Dilek, she made a joke that living in Istanbul, with its 15 million residents, was like "sitting on a bomb"; we laughed at that and she followed by saying, "it's going to explode, you know that." In Navaro-Yashin's reading, discourses of humor are triggered by anxiety about one's own position as well as one's feared visions about the future. In her field, humor and rumor served to solidify already-existing narratives for secularists about what Islamist political dominance might look like for them.

In my research, regarding Dilek's comment as an example, humor and laughter also seemed to reflect anxieties just as they repeated and amplified certain discourses. Dilek's comment seemed to reflect an anxiety about the damage that would potentially be wrought by a large earthquake, but at the same time, her comments also frequently referred to excessive human population as problematic; she also referred in negative terms to some forms of immigration into Istanbul. Thus her comment about a "bomb" going off in Istanbul also seemed to reference commonly-held ideas about "population bombs," or the idea that population itself is or will be its own environmental disaster; these ideas were pushed by Paul Ehrlich in his 1968 book *The Population Bomb*. Such theories have been refuted as placing too much emphasis on the number of people as opposed to the distribution of resources, but in any case Dilek's joke about this topic seemed to connect to both a fear of an earthquake as well as an already-established discourse about other possible "disasters" in the future.

Navaro-Yashin's other main theorization on humor, laughter and politics through her ethnography concerns the idea of cynicism, specially as used by Slajov Zizek and Peter Sloterdijk. As this idea speaks to both the idea of inaction and complacency as it does humor, it will be explored more in-depth in the next chapter, but her commentary on cynicism overall also provides an alternative political reading of the function of laughter when it comes to "things one cannot change" and powerlessness. In Navaro-Yashin's take on many Istanbul residents in the 1990s, although they were aware that the Turkish state was not real "as such," they acted as though the state was indeed "real." She defines this as cynicism, since residents were aware that the state they were supporting was not "real," but they still persisted in holding onto this idea. Navaro-Yashin compares this phenomenon of holding onto one's symptom in psychoanalysis, which has been summed up by the phrase, "They know what they are doing, but still they do it" (2002, 186). In this reading, Navaro-Yashin states that instead of organizing concrete political action or being direct in political critique about a certain topic, Istanbul residents whose primary mode of relation to the state was cynicism, or a general acceptance and acquiescence to the way things were already. Quoting Zizek, "laughter and irony" are "part of the game" in regards to cynicism, as is perhaps a type of "chic bitterness" about the current conditions. While this corresponds

more closely to my interviewees' comments about "Turkish culture" covered in Chapter 4, this reading may also be applied to the laughing comments that my interviewees made at certain points.

I have already quoted many instances in which interviewees laughed about things they were not able to accomplish: these did not seem to fall under the umbrella of cynicism since they seemed to be comments about things they intended to do in the future if possible, but were not able to as of yet (as opposed to a put-on attitude of hopelessness with no intention of action). Instead, the interpretation given by Donna Goldstein that laughter can be a response to an oppressive set of conditions or to "a moral and legal system that is currently incapable of addressing . . . grievances" seems more apropos in thoses cases, such as when Dilek and Hüseyin spoke about the projects they were not yet able to take up. However, in the example already quoted with Filiz, both of us laughed when I brought up the flaws in the building regulation procedures she had been describing. This seemed to be a closer example of knowing and behaving ("they know what they do") about the incongruities in a system but still supporting this system anyways ("but still they do it"). As a final note on this point concerning cynicism, one point Navaro-Yashin makes repeatedly is that material conditions support her object of study, in this case, the state. It is not just cynical behavior about the state that ensures its continuation but also the ways in which it is ingrained in our material worlds and the ways in which "refusing to play the game" are also punished. Thus when experts may support the general logic of flawed systems, this may also point to the systems of repurcussions that punish those who do not "play the game," especially in an illiberal environment that may target scientists and academics.

Overall, through this analysis of humor I argue that laughter and joking may represent a key manner of coping or "dealing with" the earthquake risk as it was confronted by my interviewees in our interview setting. It may also speak to how the experts I spoke with coped with this threat in their daily lives, since they needed to address this issue in their jobs quite frequently, if not every day in some form. Thus I also argue that laughter or trying to put an emotional distance between the topic may show that as interviewees who were at once experts and Istanbul residents, there may have been strain inherent in facing

the issue of the earthquake head-on. However, by diverting emotional reactions with jokes, this may have also skipped over more "critical analysis" at times, as Trnka also points out (2011). The prevalence of joking and laughter also speaks to the key theme of this thesis, namely that my interviewees may have felt powerless or incapacitated and may have reacted with laughter as a result, and furthermore that laughing may have indicated the ways in which my interviewees must fight against feelings of fear and anxiety in their daily jobs. While according to some theories this use of laughter and humor may have boosted morale and in-group feeling, in the light of theories of cynicism it may have alternatively propped up the flawed systems it was a part of by refusing to challenge them directly. In these ways, humor and laughter seemed to serve as a type of release valve in some situations, but stopping such negative emotions through laughter may not have had a positive effect overall in terms of cultivating a "critical analysis" or more direct confrontations about the current state of affairs in disaster preparation in the city.

Chapter 4

Encountering Inaction

In many studies that address the possibility of a future earthquake in Istanbul, much focus is given to the way in which the earthquake represents a risk that is then used as a narrative to change the city through urban transformation and gentrification. Although the risk is for some point in the future - and for the earthquake, according to predictions, most likely sometime in the coming decades - urban transformation and wide-scale construction is something that is affecting communities in the present day. In many cases, even in studies that state that the urban renewal efforts are effective in reducing risk, such as the one by Özlem Güzey, argue that the transformation is simultaneously hurting some residents of the city through gentrification (2016). Much of the literature on risk also focuses on the ways in which discussion on risk may create a "culture of fear" in which risks that are not as legitimate as others are promoted for the financial profit of some groups: as stated by Engin Isin, in the "culture of fear" concept, "society is asked to invest in practices that, statistically speaking, constitute much lower risks while those genuinely high risks are made trivial, mundane and routine" (2003, 219). While he criticizes the "culture of fear" thesis, he does show that many of these ideas about risk in the literature are based upon a hierarchy of risk: some risks are real and some risks are less "real," as he writes in quotations. Risk is inherently impossible to pin down definitively, but nevertheless it seems that various risks are constantly ranked according to how dangerous or likely they are. In the case of the Istanbul earthquake risk, much of the literature has focused on how "the earthquake" becomes a form of rhetoric while the actions taken in its name do not seem to always follow what should be done if such a risk is taken seriously.

However, in my research, while noting how risk has been employed as the justification for many changes in the urban landscape, I also focus on how this risk seemed to be impacting my interviewees. Far from being treated just as a rhetorical idea, many people in my field took the idea of a future Istanbul earthquake very seriously, both as experts or activists who worked on this issue and as residents who could be affected by it in the future. Although

the reactions to the threat of an earthquake varied widely, one that recurred many times was a sense of anxiety and a lack of action; this lack of action and a sense of helplessness has also been noted in some of the literature on disaster preparation in Istanbul (Eraybar et al. 2010; Karanci 2013; Tekeli-Yeşil et al. 2010a). Thus I will discuss in the first section how risk did not seem productive (in a financial sense) for many of my research participants, but rather it only produced affects of nervousness and inaction. As the theme of the chapter, I will discuss how my interviewees spoke about their encounters with inaction and how they seemed to regard themselves and the people close to them when it came to preparing (or not preparing) for this possible disaster. In the final section, I will consider inaction in a different light, this time focusing on the way in which narratives about "Turkish culture" as an explanation for inaction may be tied to the concept of "cynicism" explored in the previous chapter, and may inhibit disaster preparations overall.

4.1. Risk as Productive for Whom?

In much of the literature on risk, risk is taken as a concept that can become "productive" (Zaloom 2004). In the case of Zaloom's research, she observed in her field site of the Chicago Board of Trade, a global futures exchange, that risk was mobilized and incorporated into the identities and selves of traders working on the floor of the Chicago Board of Trade, and that it was made financially productive through speculation. For Vivian Choi, the anticipation of a future disaster in Sri Lanka has been the impetus to re-structure not only the way the state managed disaster risk, but also how they have strategized against Tamil forces (Choi 2015, 289). In the neoliberal criticism of the concept of risk, it is shown how the idea of risk aids many industries that capitalize on risk management: for instance, insurance of all kinds hinges on making risk profitable. And, as Choi's work shows, the narrative of preparing for a future event through "risk management" can be a powerful narrative by which many domains of life are restructured, including state policy.

In terms of Istanbul's disaster risk regarding earthquakes, risk is made profitable through the state-run mandatory earthquake insurance fund, the housing and apartment complexes

that advertise themselves as ready for an earthquake, and through the examinations performed by private firms that ascertain whether a building is earthquake-ready. As discussed previously, the justification for the urban transformation building projects derives from the narrative of preparing for a possible large earthquake, through both the state-run TOKİ and private firms. Thus, this logic of neoliberal risk serves as the justification for such wide-scale changes, and for the laws that allow the state to designate disaster-prone areas for renewal (Saraçoğlu & Demirtaş-Milz 2014; Adanalı 2013).

The question arises, then, of for whom exactly such risk is productive. Homeowners and people who possess legal property rights to their apartment may benefit from the 2012 Disaster Law that allows them to receive a new home and rental assistance while their old home is being demolished. But for those without formal property rights or for those who live outside of neighborhoods with high property values, risk does not seem productive or profitable. For people without sufficient financial means, they cannot not take advantage of construction laws to their benefit, and for renters or those who did not have a say in these processes, they actually were disadvantaged; in many cases renters or people without property documents are, in effect, forcibly displaced by these construction processes.

At many points in my research, I talked to friends and acquaintances about my research topic. By merely stating that I was researching the earthquake preparations in the city, I brought up the idea of the possible future earthquake threat in general. Thus I often had conversations with people in which they said, “Oh yes, the earthquake!” and spoke about their own home, their workplace, or what they were or were not doing about the threat. Quite frequently, people made jokes or brought up the fact that they were not doing very much to prepare, if anything at all. Some parallels can be drawn here with the type of cynicism that Yael Navaro-Yashin described in her ethnography about how people understood exactly how the state was not “real” but instead made jokes or accepted the situation as it was without taking direct action. As discussed in the previous chapter, such jokes may have indeed was substituted for action or “critical analysis” as theorized by Trnka.

This lack of preparation on the part of many people in my environment contrasted with the people I interviewed, who were professionals on this topic. However, since three of my "expert" interviewees had not prepared an earthquake kit, they also shared something in common with the people who said they had done nothing to prepare. It should also be noted that many people in my social circle are students like myself and are almost always renters. They are not planning or considering buying a house in the future or investing in retrofitting for an apartment they do not own. Thus this anecdote about the field is skewed towards a certain income type and towards people who rent, if not even sublet from renters. However, even with this being said, many people in my social circle also had not conducted non-structural hazard mitigation or prepared an earthquake kit; they reacted with nervousness and humor about this situation.

Following Foucault's concept of governmentality in his approach to risk, Engin Isin states in his conception of the "neurotic citizen" that, under new forms of power in our current era, the citizen as a subject is forced to govern itself "through responses to anxieties and uncertainties" that are not completely rational but instead based on affect and emotion (2004, 223). Since I also encountered many instances in which people expressed to me that they felt anxious and uncertain about the earthquake risk, it seemed as though Isin was correct to incorporate an analysis of affect into how individuals approach the many risks that exist in the present day. For these people, risk was not productive in a financial sense. Instead, it was productive in the sense of conjuring an affect of anxiety and nervousness. This often coincided with a lack of action. Thus, if anything, risk only seemed to produce anxiety, not profit; it affected people individually and on the level of emotions.

For people who could not move or who did not have knowledge about preparedness measures, the risk of a strong earthquake happening soon was not productive in the same sense of "the earthquake" as an overarching narrative that justifies large-scale construction projects or the re-creation of the cityscape. Instead, in many cases, risk did not produce anything but fearful emotions and inaction: the term inaction here can refer to many residents' financial inability or refusal to physically change houses. At the same time, it can

indicate a sense of powerlessness and lack of preparatory action, even concerning smaller tasks like preparing an earthquake kit.

In their study conducted in the Avcılar and Bakırköy neighborhoods of Istanbul, Eraybar et al. show that, of the 865 residents they surveyed, approximately 50% did not have a plan for a safer house despite their geographical region being one of the most high-risk in the city (2010, 90). They also found that "the vast majority of respondents [did] not plan to implement relatively simple measures such as the purchase of an insurance policy, engage in awareness-raising within the family and among neighbors, and secure the safety of non-structural elements" (2010, 87). In another study that evaluated both the resources needed for Istanbul residents to prepare alongside the qualities that may prevent action, Karanci found that "helplessness, fatalism, denial and externalisation of responsibility (i.e. belief that mitigation and preparedness is the responsibility of local or central government institutions)" were factors that seemed to hinder preparation (2013). In Tekeli-Yeşil et al., it was found that "location, direct personal experience, a higher education level, and social interaction" promoted preparatory actions for an earthquake while "outcome expectancy, helplessness, a low socioeconomic level, a culture of negligence, a lack of trust, onset time/poor predictability, and normalisation bias inhibit individuals in this process" (2010a). While all three studies focused on different neighborhoods, elements of the situation and factors that affected various groups, I would like to focus on the lack of action that the authors found in the behavior of the Istanbulites they surveyed and spoke with.

In many ways, Istanbul is similar to other areas that are at risk of natural disasters but whose residents generally do not prepare for such events; as one example, FEMA in the US found that "nearly 60 percent of American adults have not practiced what to do in a disaster by participating in a disaster drill or preparedness exercise at work, school, or home in the past year" despite 80% of Americans living in a county that has been affected by a disaster since 2007 (fema.gov). This general trend and its relevance for Istanbul is important to note if only to emphasize that the "productivity" potential of disasters seems to be related to the relative level of power of groups. While individuals are not preparing, corporations and the

state are able through their economic and political power to turn this earthquake risk into a profitable phenomenon.

In the next section, I address how my interviewees, as people who were generally more informed, knowledgeable and prepared than the general population, related to the people close to them; in particular I focus on how they encountered the inaction of people close to them and what this may say about their position as disaster experts.

4.2. Interviewees' Encounters with Inaction

Since the people I interviewed were typically invested in preparing for the earthquake in part due to their professional work on the issue, many of them were active in spreading information and knowledge about what one can do to prepare for a possible earthquake. For instance, when I asked Emre whether he had an earthquake kit at home, he replied that since he and his wife had just moved, they still needed to prepare the kit for their new home. While mentioning that he had sent his wife a list of items that needed to be in the bag, he also noted that she had forwarded this information to their friends through text and had told them to also prepare a bag for their own homes.

Similarly, two female interviewees I talked to were the ones who had taken responsibility for making their family's earthquake kit, conducting training drills, and deciding on the emergency meeting points for their families. When I asked Dilek about her family's reaction to her organization of these efforts, she said that they were "ready" due to having experienced the two earthquakes in 1999. She mentioned that she didn't have to "force them" to participate in the drills and preparation efforts that she organized for them as a family - they accepted this "voluntarily." When I spoke to Filiz, she also said that she was the one who organized the preparation efforts for her household:

> Filiz: All my furnitures are attached to the wall, to the columns... well, it's a new building, and then I... follow all the precautions, steps for my house. And even my family - my kids, my husband, they are aware of the earthquake, and sometimes I simply do some, um- simulations? "Okay, the earthquake!" I just shout, and the people-

Laura: Yeah.
Filiz: -I follow them. If they run, or if they just sit and wait for the earthquakes, and yeah.

Filiz also informed me that she advises her neighbors on how to secure their furniture and other non-structural hazards that could become dangerous in an earthquake when she visits their homes. She also advises friends and relatives about which homes are safe for them to buy when they are considering moving homes.

Both when discussing her relatives and neighbors she emphasized that they take her advice. For both Dilek and Filiz, I did not ask directly if their family or friends listened to them on these matters; they volunteered this information themselves, and in Filiz's case she sounded happy that her family and friends were doing what she recommended. On one hand, this seems to indicate how important it was for many of my interviewees to pass along the knowledge they had gained about the earthquake risk, and how the people close to them could take immediate steps to protect themselves. This went above and beyond their professional roles and showed that they in fact used their expert knowledge and their concern about this issue to assist others, and to protect themselves and their "loved ones" as Dilek phrased it when discussing this matter. On the other hand, it was also interesting that both Filiz and Dilek specifically noted that their advice was followed; this may be interpreted as comments made in a context in which many people do not prepare their houses or attempt to move to safer homes, and thus my interviewees were happy to see that the people they had given this important information to ended up taking it and performing actions to prepare instead of reacting with the "helplessness" that has been found in studies on Istanbul preparation.

In contrast, earthquake professionals like Emre, Filiz and Dilek can specifically be construed as being more active in the face of such disaster risk, as opposed to being more inactive. When I spoke to Dilek about the members of her family, she mentioned that she lived with her mother and that her mother also took part in the tasks. I asked who made the earthquake kit in her house, her or her mother, and she answered that she usually told her mother what to do, and then her mother followed her advice. She said that it was known in her family that she was more "detailed" and that her family knows about the threat because

she “keeps telling them” about information she has learned in trainings she has attended. Especially for Filiz and Dilek as women and members of a household, they were the ones who took on the organizational labor of planning and executing preparation efforts. Dilek’s family may have been “ready” to accept these preparation efforts but they were started through her initiative; it sounds similar for Filiz’s case as well. This fits the general trend of women as the ones who take on the burden of doing the labor required to prepare against earthquake risks and disaster risks in general (Mulilis 1999). In Dilek’s case, she also laughed a bit after she said that her family knows because she “keeps telling them” about the different steps that can be taken to prepare, which can be interpreted as showing that her position in the family as the one responsible for such safety action and knowledge was quite clear. However, it of course cannot be said that it is a rule that the adult woman in a household is automatically the person who takes on this type of labor. When we were discussing her mother, Dilek specifically called her approach “inactive” in comparison to hers; while her mother went along with what she asked her to do, it was Dilek who educated herself and put in the effort of organizing and arranging preparation activities for the house.

While Filiz and Dilek expressed stories about the ease with which they were able to have their friends, family and neighbors follow their advice about what action they should take, Yavuz spoke to me about the difficulties he faced in trying to get his mother to leave her current apartment, as he thought it was unsafe. He said that his mother valued being able to easily socialize with her friends and her current apartment is near many transportation lines, thus making it easier for her to reach her friends, so her “priority” was different than his, since she did not want to move and give up this access to her social life despite the apartment being unsafe in Yavuz’ eyes. Since he has been working on the earthquake issue for several years, I asked him if this had been going on for a while, and he said yes. He has been trying to get her to move to someplace more safe for some time, but they could not find a house within their family’s budget. Yavuz specifically mentioned that he felt “afraid for her a bit” and he emphasized that he would be much more “happy” if she would move.

My interviewee Gülser was the most emotive and expressive on this subject when it came to the issue of people who do not prepare. She was very frustrated about this issue in general, and I spoke to her about it both before the interview and during the recording. She said that she had highly educated friends, but many of them did nothing to prepare for the earthquake. She recounted that some of them had been in the coastal area of Bodrum this past summer (in 2017), and that they had called her in alarm after experiencing the smaller earthquakes that had struck the region during that time. After her friends recounted their surprise to her, she said to them: "I told you!" She also expressed the following to me:

> Gülser: This is a dilemma: Why? I mean, an educate... for instance, my friend graduated from university. *Yani* [that is], I mean, they are educated, but not educated about earthquake, but they are graduated from university and they know many things, political and economical, everything. But they don't care [about the] earthquake.
> Laura: What do they say, do they say anything?
> Gülser: They don't know, they don't care, they're not interested in this subject. *(hits table for emphasis)* Interesting, *çok* [very] interesting!

Gülser, when I brought up this lack of action or even a sense of helplessness, enthusiastically said that one does not need to wait for the government to do something but rather, anyone can do something through their own initiative. In this way, it reinforces once again that several interviewees were very proactive and self-motivated to take the action they had learned about, and that they took steps to inform others about this information as well. They were the ones to pass on knowledge and to encourage others to start to undertake some kind of preparation as well.

At the same time, the presence of this personal initiative and the organizational labor that my interviewees undertook to help their family and friends be informed and take action also seemed to set them apart socially and perhaps affectively as well. With Gülser especially, it can be seen that she approached the earthquake risk in a different manner than her social circle: whereas she advocated being proactive, they preferred to ignore the issue and ignore her advice. This made her frustrated and caused her to question this topic intellectually as well, as she told me. When her friends called her in shock about the earthquake they'd experienced in Bodrum, she made fun of their surprise to me, most likely because she had performed emotional labor in trying to get them to take action about this

issue and stress its importance for quite some time, and it took them experiencing an earthquake themselves to finally acknowledge her labor, knowledge, and concern.

Although the context differs greatly, the way in which my interviewees differed from some people in their social surroundings in terms of their orientation towards risk is reminiscent of Sara Ahmed's approach to theorizing how affect works within groups. Her work typically focuses on the way in which marginalized and minority people, their bodies, and their accompanying affects function within, for example, heteronormative spaces or majority-white educational institutions (Ahmed 2010, 2012). This is clearly not the case for my field as this thesis focuses on approaches and orientations towards risk and action, and importantly on experts who are generally privileged in several regards. Despite this difference, though, two associations may be made: first, the way in which my interviewees necessarily brought up the topic of the earthquake and what Istanbulites should do to prepare in their social world through their status as earthquake professionals and through the ways in which they often brought this up outside of their professional life, as some of my interviewees told me. It should be noted that when one brings up this threat in Istanbul, to residents of Istanbul, it can inspire feelings of fear or anxiety concerning the possibility of such a potentially destructive and harmful disaster. In the same way, I experienced reactions of fear and anxiety when mentioning my research, and encountered anxious responses from people and replies that they had not prepared. In this way, my interviews and myself sometimes appeared as "affect aliens": as Ahmed describes them, "affect aliens are those who are alienated by virtue of how they are affected by the world or how they affect others in the world" (2010, 164). In this case, my interviewees sometimes appeared as affect aliens to the people close to them through their status as experts on the earthquake, as people who raised the threat of the earthquake and encouraged an approach of awareness and preparation. They thus experienced alienation from the dominant affects of many people in Istanbul: namely, ignorance (which may or may not be "bliss"), the pushing away and subsequent denial of anxiety and fear, and/or a refusal to prepare.

In addition, Navaro-Yashin's analysis of cynicism as a dominant affective response in Istanbul seems pertinent here. Navaro-Yashin states that, at the time of her fieldwork,

"mundane cynicism" was the most popular mode, but some activist groups who regularly gathered, organized and protested, such as the Saturday Mothers who gathered every week to call attention to their missing relatives, fell outside this cynical mode (2002, 170). Within the two groups I analyze here, my interviewees and the people close to them, my interviewees also seemed to fall outside this particular form of cynicism, since they actively worked to address the earthquake threat. On the other hand, some of the responses my interviewees described and many of the responses I encountered in the city seemed to echo Navaro-Yashin's quote from someone who was cynical and aware of this fact: "We have accepted the situation as it is; we have become indifferent" (2002, 175). This may be relevant when combined with Ahmed's description of encounters between people with different affective dispositions.

In her work, Ahmed uses "affect alien" to describe several different types of affective situations, but one main figure she analyzes is the "melancholic migrant": the migrant of color who holds on to their feelings regarding experiences of racism and feelings of non-belonging in the dominant community (such as the white U.K. population), the feelings of whom then disturb the majority, who react against this nonconformity. It's implied that the majority also does not like this because they are implicitly made aware of their country's history and their own complicity with this racism. Ahmed also notes that one reason for becoming an affect alien can be "consciousness of racism" since this causes one's emotional reactions to break off from the dominant mood: she cites an example of Yasmin Hai's memoir, who writes that she realized that her emotional reaction to the Iraq and Afghanistan wars after 9/11 was not in line with the majority affects of excitement, since she had recently become aware of the power dynamics between Britain and its Muslim migrants (2010, 157).

This figure who disturbs the dominant mood through their consciousness may also apply to my interviewees, who, through their profession and knowledge, brought up the spectre of the earthquake to people who would perhaps remain ignorant or unaware of this situation. In another figure that Ahmed employs, the "feminist killjoy," the feminist points out instances of sexism - that already existed in the environment although it may be ignored or

denied - and subsequently gets blamed for being the origin of bad feeling, even though the feminist killjoy was pointing out something already present and causing bad feeling. Ahmed notes that many such affective dynamics in groups revolve around the conversion of emotion. By bringing up something that was suppressed or ignored, the affect alien or feminist killjoy converts happiness into disturbance or sadness. In the same way, my interviewees converted happiness (perhaps as in the "bliss" of ignorance) into anxiety or fear about the earthquake situation. Just as sexism was also already present, the earthquake situation has been present in the city for many decades and remains a problem today that often goes unaddressed. Navaro-Yashin's idea of cynical residents of Istanbul may also be comparable: the cynic is someone who is psychoanalytically wedded to their "symptom." In this case, the "symptom" that they are aware of is their knowledge that a large earthquake would be dangerous, but they take no action to confront this situation or acknowledge the problem. In this encounter between the expert or activist and the cynic, the expert or activist is the one who confronts their "symptom" and decides to dismantle cynical self-deception. That the cynic reacts in a dismissive, unconcerned or even mocking way to the activist seems more clear when read through the figure of the affect alien or the feminist killjoy. Navaro-Yashin defined the mode of cynicism as the dominant affect in her fieldwork, and as such the activist affect alien or kill joy falls outside this majority mode of relating to one's environment.

Following this logic, it also seemed to make my interviewees happy when their raising of the earthquake threat did not inspire a conversion of feeling into something negative, or into denial: when Filiz talked about her friends and neighbors taking her advice about preparations, she seemed pleased and happy that she was not met with resistance to her recommendations and information. On the other hand, Yavuz said he was prevented from being "much more" happy if he could only succeed in getting his mother to prioritize the earthquake risk as he did. There was a mismatch in affect, it seems, as his happiness was prevented from being fulfilled through his mother's actions, which failed to prioritize the earthquake threat as he did.

In addition, Dilek talked about her family being "ready" to prepare, but she also had to perform the organizational and emotional labor needed to help her family conduct drills and create kits. She also seemed content with the fact that her family went along with her preparations, but she emphasized her own activeness regarding this situation while she called her mother's stance "inactive." In this manner, I argue that there is a second type of conversion going on: namely, that while one type of conversion is the transformation of "good" feeling into "bad" (nervous) feeling, another is a personal transformation from nervousness, fear, and anxiety into action. My interviewees expressed fear and anxiety about the earthquake threat at times, but importantly, through their jobs they took initiative to help in preparation efforts. As mentioned, a significant number of interviewees made earthquake preparation not only their profession but also their hobby, volunteer work, or second job; they also spoke to their friends, family, neighbors, and sometimes the media about the threat.

Thus it seems as though my interviewees may be set apart from the dominant response to the earthquake threat by nature of their own determination and activeness in confronting this problem head-on in many ways. This contrasts with many people who feel nervous or scared about the disaster threat but fail to convert this feeling into action, or, following Navaro-Yashin's formulation, cynics who refuse to confront their own lack of action. However, this still does once again make these interviewees affect aliens: when Dilek spoke about herself in regards to her family and preparation, she often differentiated herself by emphasizing that she was the more detailed, rational and prepared member of the family who organized their emergency response. Her different emotional role was especially clear when she described what this dynamic was like during the 1999 earthquake, which her family experienced together at their apartment in Istanbul when she was a preteen:

> "Back then I was just a kid, but I was aware of the fact that earthquakes is a part of Turkey, because we received some trainings at school. But as I already said, they were not enough. But, compared to have nothing *(laughs a bit)*, we have some certain things. Uh, I felt a bit surprised, but, uh, I don't know. I wasn't very shocked. I wasn't let's say, affected just like my mom. My mom affected very badly and my brothers affected. They were affected very badly but I wasn't affected like them. And, because I was a bit prepared against the earthquakes, so I was actually, it's a part of my personality. Uh, I'm a bit *(laugh)* cold-heart person, so it's a bit difficult

> for me to, let's say, get excited in terms of any emergency, yeah? I was the cool one. But not my family."

She went on to describe that she followed the correct procedures she had learned in school in terms of stopping her family from panicking during the earthquake, and then led them outside after the shaking was over. When she uses the term "cold-heart person" I assume she is referring to how she remained "cool" under pressure, as she said, using her preparation knowledge, as opposed to her family's panicked response. This remarkable story also seemed to show to me the dedication and long-term history that many experts I spoke with had when it came to the earthquake issue, as many were affected by the 1999 and continued on to work in preparedness or research as a profession, as Dilek also went on to do.

Interestingly Yavuz also shared a similar story of having a different kind of affect than his family during the 1999 earthquake:

> Yavuz: Because when the 1999 earthquake, during the occurrence of the 1999 earthquake, we were living in a - with my wife, there were no child at that time, so we were living in the sixth floor of a fifteen-floor apartment. Six floor. So when the earthquake happening- there was a quite... strong... effect of the earthquake, and then while we were shaking - so, I mean, I was thinking about, "I hope, I hope the Marmara is broken now."
> Laura: I see.
> Yavuz: I was thinking about that, "I hope the Marmara is broken now." So it means, if the Marmara was broken at that time, we will - uh, have no more earthquake during the next 100 years. So I was thinking about this. *(I laugh a bit)* So this is the difference between the people who are dealing with the earthquake and the normal people; my wife was.. uh, having a- she was scaring, and then she was screaming, "Oh, woahahah, what are we going to do!" - I was thinking about, oh, okay (*he pauses and laughs*) - this is the difference.

Interestingly, in the two examples above, Dilek and Yavuz actually show a kind of calm and distance during the events themselves. Both characterize themselves as more emotionally distant and calm while the building was shaking, and they talk about being focused on the science of the earthquake or on what current training says one should do during an earthquake.

As noted by anthropologist Dominic Boyer, experts are not just "rational(ist) creatures of expertise" but rather "desiring, relating, doubting, anxious, contentious, affective … human-subjects" (2008, 38). By pointing out how my interviewees talked about their encounters with people close to them who refused to prepare or who were inactive, I show that, even though they are "experts," emotions and affect played a role in how they saw themselves and how they approach the current state of preparation in the city. Some were happy that their push for preparation was met without resistance, some were upset when family would not follow their advice, and some were frustrated with friends who didn't seem to heed their warnings. In characterizing them as a type of "affect alien," it shows that affects apply not only to issues of racial, national, and gendered dynamics, but also to situations of risk and disaster. In Istanbul, since ignorance, denial and inaction are so common, the "experts" on this topic stood apart from the majority not only in their level of knowledge and their level of activeness in preparation, but also in their emotional stance.

In addition, only through thinking of them in this way did I realize how my interviewees also spoke of themselves as "other" from the people close to them due to their own level of knowledge about the tectonic plates or about correct emergency response. As such, it may be important for the study of expertise to consider how the amount of knowledge and the subsequent motivation to prepare can make these professionals feel alienated from those close to them. While I did not discuss this in-depth with my interviewees, when also considering how they needed to navigate speaking about the threat to the public despite ignorance, how they pushed to be able to continue their civil society organization's activities under increased pressure, and how they also needed to convince people around them about this risk, it paints a picture of conditions that may sometimes feel quite alienating indeed. Future research and ethnographic studies may need to be done in order to understand more how this self-perception as affectively different, and these emotions regarding encounters with immobility affect "experts" both as people and as professionals in their work on preparation.

4.3. Cultural Essentialism as Encouraging Inaction

While one form of inaction that I and my interviewees seemed to have encountered in the field was a lack of preparation, on the other hand, many people stated the same reason for why there was a general lack of preparatory action: it was due to "Turkish culture." This discussion came up in several of my interviews unprompted as the reasoning for why many people did not prepare for the earthquake, just as it was offered for other elements of the earthquake readiness situation, such as corruption in building practices and why some scientists would give misleading answers about when an earthquake may occur. As such, cultural essentialism seemed to encourage inaction, as it seemed to refer to an essential characteristic of "Turkish people" that was static and thus unable to change. While this was a sense in which the "experts" I was interviewing engaged with me on the topic of culture, I present a critical view of how "culture" was used in terms of its possible negative effects on Istanbul earthquake preparation. I argue that this conceptualization of "Turkish people" as inherently fatalistic and passive in regards to the earthquake threat is problematic for two reasons: for one because it may obscure the political, economic or historical factors that may inhibit preparation efforts (although some interviewees explicitly noted some of these factors), and secondly because it may inhibit change and political mobility through its essentialism. In addition, such self-identifications also seemed to be problematic because they supported static, national self-conceptions based on Turkey's relation to "the West," and as such they may be brought into conversation with Meltem Ahıska's (2003) concept of Occidentalism as well as Ayşe Gül Altınay's (2004) analysis of how culture was used as a rationalization of militarization in Turkish history in *The Myth of the Military Nation*. As to why it may have been so prevalent in my fieldwork, I refer again to Navaro-Yashin's conceptualization of cynicism. While her work discusses the Turkish state and these comments were made in relation to "Turkish culture," many parallels may be drawn.

In her work on the topic of earthquake preparation, Angell also found that people often told her that Turkish people are "naturally fatalistic" and that this was given as an explanation for "failures in preparedness" (2014, 673). This explanation came up in my interviews in different ways. Just as Angell states, "Turkish culture" was often associated with fatalism

by my interviewees; this has been cited in previous studies about earthquakes in Turkey. For instance, Jacoby and Özerdem use the 2003 study performed by Kasapoğlu and Ecevit, to state that more than half of the survivors of the 1999 earthquake who they surveyed had not taken any steps to prepare for a future earthquake, and of those respondents, 13% "explained their inaction in terms of the fatalistic passivity frequently ascribed to Muslim society" (2008). My exchange with Yavuz on this topic covered this idea. He said that failing to prepare was part of Turkish culture, and I told him that I had also heard that idea and that I was wondering about his opinion. He replied in this manner:

> Yavuz: It's a cultural thing.
> Laura: Cultural thing.
> Yavuz: Yeah, it's a cultural. It's a - Middle East-
> Laura: Middle East?
> Yavuz: Yeah I mean, Middle Eastern or East European culture, I think.

A minute later in our conversation he said the following, after stating that German and Japanese people are not like Turkish people:

> Yavuz: Mostly the German... yeah yeah, the Germans are much more strict. And the Japanese also. I know this, this too, I have visited most of the world, but I know these people are much more sensitive- let's say, about the coming danger, or risk- about risk. You know, we say- maybe you have heard the Turkish word *inşallah*, *maşallah*, *Allah saklısın*, God bless us, you know? *(laughing a bit)* We have some kinds of, you know, the most of the people dealing with the religion, they are - saying, God bless us, yeah yeah, that's the main problem.
> Laura: Mhm. Do you think it affects the preparations?
> Yavuz: It affects the preparations- yeah, of course, sure. Because people, people, some of the people think it's coming from the God.

He then went on to state that such reliance on fate or God wasn't "meaningful" because "everyone should be ready." He also said that it was "Turkish" to say what people wanted to hear: as an example, he said that some scientists are stating that an earthquake will not happen for at least 40-50 years, because this makes them "one of the best scientists" (because, according to his explanation, such statements then allow people to abdicate their responsibility to prepare until that time). This statement differed slightly from the general comments that I heard, and that Angell also encountered, for instance, that "Turks are

essentially fatalistic (*kaderci*)" in that he said it was about expressing ideas that other people "wanted to hear" (2014, 673).

When I spoke with Hüseyin about this idea of "Turkish people" or "Turkish culture," as he had brought up, he identified fatalism as a way of thinking that is present in "Islamic societies." When I mentioned people I knew who were not doing anything to prepare, he said their "priorities or [their] way of thinking may be different," bringing up *kadercilik* as a term. He stated: "They say, if it's written on my forehead, I have nothing to do," going on to state in Turkish the same phrase. I had brought up the phrase "*yapacak bir şey yok*" earlier in the interview as a common statement made in Turkish in which one says that there is "nothing to be done" about a situation. In the Turkish phrase, he incorporated this saying of "*yapacak bir şey yok*": Hüseyin said "if you have something written on your forehead, there is nothing to be done," in this case meaning because it has already been determined by God. This was interesting because I had brought the phrase "nothing to be done," which is not inherently religious, and he combined it with the idea of fate. Hüseyin went on to state that "most people think" in this way. I asked if it was also something that he thought secularist people did, and he said yes, that many of his secularist friends also thought in this fatalistic way. He then said that "it has become a culture." Thus he theorized Turkish culture as having been affected by this religious idea, and gave his own account of how religiosity or professed belief in secularism did not affect who could potentially hold such an idea.

In the case of Gülser, when she brought up the idea of Turkish culture, she also mentioned "Mediterranean culture." I asked her more about this: she said that in Izmir, people were more "well-educated," while in the eastern part of Turkey, they were not, although she was quick to clarify that this was "not their fault" and that the government needed to offer them more "education." She had mentioned "Turkish culture" when we discussed people who failed to prepare at all for the earthquake as well as contractors and inspectors who took bribes or failed to follow construction and building codes. Thus she seemed to connect "culture" to an idea of access to education; throughout the interview she stressed that such behaviors (which were due to culture) could be changed through education, training, and

awareness-raising. Gülser formulated culture not only as national, but also as regional, since she also described "Eastern," "Turkish," "Mediterranean," and regional cultures within the boundaries of Turkey, which can also possibly be read as ethnic designations, since referring to the "East" of Turkey often implies Kurdishness, although this was not stated as such. It should also be noted that Gülser is the same person who was frustrated with her highly-educated friends for refusing to prepare, and as such she herself pointed out the contradiction of using education to ensure that people prepare within Turkey.

However, Gülser's regionalization was more specific than other interviewees, who mentioned "Turkish" culture or "Eastern" and "Middle Eastern" culture. In the case of Hüseyin, he said that the reason why many earthquake meeting points have been covered up with shopping centers and buildings is due to something in the "cells of the Turkish people":

> "Look like this to your question. In Istanbul, the price of the land is very high, you know. And- I think it's in the, in our *cells*, in the cells of the Turkish people, I don't know. We can forget *everything*, very easy. So we cannot give the right attention to the subjects. It's a very important, very big problem for us. Anybody asks to me the hugest problem of the Istanbul, I say: 'Earthquake.' Most of them say: 'Traffic.' No, earthquake. *(laughs)*"

While this quote connects to the previous discussion on failure to take action, it also reveals a way in which Hüseyin describes the behavior of people in Turkey: as something rooted in their "cells." I later brought up this comment and I asked him why he thought Turkish people may be the way he described. He then replied by referencing, for instance, the way that Turkish entertainment media keeps people distracted from other issues, saying that this has been going on for "thirty to forty years." Thus he offered differing backgrounds for how culture might come about: while his first comment had a background that implied biological and nationalist essentialism ("the cells of the Turkish people") he then made a more political critique and set a defined time frame for this effect when I asked him for elaboration on this idea.

In his article "Cultural Essentialism and Cultural Anxiety," Ralph Grillo examines common usages of the concept of culture both within the discipline of anthropology and in public

discourse (2003). Citing authors such as Ulf Hannerz and Unni Wikan, Grillo shows that there exists a tension between anthropologists and the public in how the world "culture" is used and what it means, especially since anthropologists have moved away from more bounded and static notions of culture and towards "dynamic, anti-essentialist" notions such as those of Homi Bhabha's, whose notion treats culture as a site of contestation and flux (2003, 160). However, despite anthropologists changing their understanding of this concept to something more open and "dynamic," the "old," bounded and static interpretation is more popular in the public understanding (2003). In my research, my discussions with these experts on culture reflected this difference, just as my interviewees gave their own interpretations and understanding that did sometimes go along with a slightly more dynamic understanding of culture. As can be seen in Hüseyin's response, he states that fatalism became divorced from its religious context and became something more widespread in Turkish culture. When I asked my interviewees questions about this notion of Turkish culture, I also asked them to engage in a discussion about the nature of culture in a way that showed that I was then sharing a particular realm of expertise with them in a form of para-ethnography, or studying sideways, as discussed in Chapter 1.

At the same time, it seems that the comments of the people I interviewed follow Grillo's assertion that the more popular form of understanding of the term "culture" is one more rooted in essentialism. As he defines it, "cultural essentialism" refers to "a system of belief grounded in a conception of human beings as 'cultural' (and under certain conditions territorial and national) subjects, i.e. bearers of a culture, located within a boundaried world, which defines them and differentiates them from others" (2003, 158). Here, just as Angell also points out, this conception of culture appears in a nationalist form as well, in the idea of "Turkish" culture. For the interviewees who only mentioned "Turkish" culture or "Turkish" people when we were discussing Istanbul, this of course did not necessarily include the many long-term and recent populations who do not identify as "Turkish" culturally or nationally, or who may not be citizens of Turkey. This thus seemed to represent a form of benign nationalism in which such a category was not necessarily questioned. For instance, Dilek and I discussed Syrian immigrants to the city at length, and she differentiated them from "Turkish people" in her rhetoric. Yavuz described the

response of the Japanese people he knew living in Istanbul, and how he thought they were more prepared than Turkish people. Thus, while the boundaries of who exactly fell under the heading of being "Turkish," groups of people seen as immigrants or foreigners did not seem to be included in this understanding.

The fact that many of my research participants told me similar narratives about fatalism and "Turkishness" as a rationale for why people do not prepare is problematic in terms of what this widespread type of thinking may effect. Especially when described as something unchanging and ingrained in a certain group of people, this type of cultural essentialism may prevent analysis of the political, economic and historic reasons why Istanbul residents may not be preparing. In fact, many of my interviewees also made comments that could be construed as small political critiques, but they accompanied ideas of cultural essentialism at the same time (with the exception of Osman). As I have highlighted in Chapter 2, for instance, the dominant governing strategy of neoliberalism, the state's adversarial relationship with civil society and its lack of a widespread earthquake readiness plan that involves the general population may all be some reasons why inaction is so common in the city. These factors do not have to do with "culture" but with political and economic factors that have historical roots, but which can always change in the future to different constellations of power, since they are not essential but rather the results of struggles over power and politics. Secondly, since "culture" seemed to be constructed as an essential quality, the fact that so many of my interviewees expressed this may point to a wider acceptance of this logic in the preparation community and in Istanbul in general. This in itself seems problematic in that it may depress motivation or mobilization efforts: if people believe that some people living in Turkey (or "Turkish people,") will not prepare as an inherent quality, they may not do enough to reach out to them or to include them in programs, for instance.

While cultural and national essentialism is something that can be espoused in any national context, in particular the fact that "Turkish culture" was associated with fatalism, passivity and corruption by my interviewees also seemed to recall tropes of Orientalism as well as Meltem Ahıska's concept of Occidentalism. In her article, Ahıska says that notions of what

"the West" and "modernization" are like have historically been strategically employed by elites in Turkey to justify their policies towards people within Turkey, and that this Occidentalism also results from the tensions inherent in failing to address Turkey's history and current status vis-a-vis Western nations, itself, and its own colonizing history (2003). However, under this umbrella, Ahıska also points towards the struggles inherent in trying to understand one's own position in this complicated field of power and history. By stating that "Turkish people" are inherently predestined towards inaction, this may support elite interests in the country today, who would rather that people remain passive and apolitical. In this vein of thinking, this embrace of cultural essentialism may be especially problematic in that it sets people's expectations low about their ability to inspire political and physical change in the city regarding earthquake readiness.

In a similar fashion, the work of Ayşe Gül Altınay on her study of the justification of militarism in Turkey is instructive, since she shows how a notion of "Turkish culture" being inherently militaristic justified the introduction of compulsory military service to people in a country who had previously associated the military with "war and death" (2004, 8). By placing the reasoning for this change in the realm of "culture" as opposed to politics or national military strategy, it insulated the decision against critique and protest. In the same way, the repetition of passiveness as a "Turkish" trait may harm efforts to resist urban transformation projects, the covering up of earthquake meeting points, and other such projects that are currently underway in the neoliberal restructuring of the city.

However, as noted previously, Osman, among all of the interviewees was the most clear in his definition of "Turkish culture" as a certain political environment which suppresses dissent and fails to give representation to average citizens. When prompted, he was quick to clarify that, as a particular political system, it always had the potential to change in the future; in this way he clearly differentiate himself from a biological or essentialist usage of "culture." In his comments, he also offered paths forward through political means, such as emphasizing the importance of earthquake meeting points to city officials in charge of such decisions. As such, his politicization of the idea of "Turkish culture" was the most non-essentialist in terms of the space he left for change in the future, and the ways in which he

advocated and outlined steps that can be taken, although he was not always optimistic about how effective they would be.

At this point, Navaro-Yashin's application of psychoanalysis to the political in terms of Istanbul is important in contextualizing and understanding these statements as well. In her ethnography, Navaro-Yashin found that Istanbul residents treated the Turkish state as though it were "real," as though it was a cohesive entity and as though its messages about itself could be believed, even as they simultaneously demonstrated that they could "see through" the facade of the state by critiquing it. Drawing on Peter Sloterdijk and Slajov Zizek, Navaro-Yashin posits that this type of behavior is "cynical" since people are aware of the falsity of the state, but yet they still behave as though they do not know this. At the same time, this cynicism manifests itself as an idea that "nothing can be done" ("yapacak bir şey yok"): "The idea is that things are 'just bad' and there is not much hope in trying to change them" (2012, 164). In saying that "Turkish people" are "just like this" it seems to mirror Navaro-Yashin's observations about relations to the state in two ways: for one, that people constantly espoused a narrative about "Turkish people" as though they believed in this concepts, and at the same time, they described "Turkish people" as a group that does not take action against risk or other political situations (since the earthquake preparations are political in many ways).

For the first aspect, the idea of Turkish people, I did not observe and speak with my interviewees long enough on this topic to understand their other thoughts or ideas about what "Turkish people" may mean. As noted by Navaro-Yashin, while some people may be cynics about the state and Turkish politics, others have repeated such behaviors so much that she says they may truly start to believe what they do. At hand in this situation is the idea that there is some quality of "Turkish people" versus political and economic realities that make it difficult to change the earthquake preparation environment. Instead of discussing these issues, such as urban transformation and myriad class issues, the idea that "Turkish people" simply don't take action due to their essential nature seemed to be a shorthand way of accounting for the situation. It may have also functioned as a cynical way in which people approached this situation, since many may have known that "Turkey" as a

nation is an exclusive and violently-formed category of people that was formed as a political construction, not a biological reality. Finally, the idea that "Turkish people" are, in a way, cynical, and don't change, seemed to reflect Navaro-Yashin's point that people seemed to be aware of their own cynicism and inaction:

> "At this time, it appeared that there was a public awareness of the ordinary cynicism that was prevalent. Beyond the sort of consciousness that Zizek allows the subject, I will argue that there was even consciousness about one's own cynical acts in this case. Not only an englightened reflection on ideology, as argued by Zizek, but also a self-critique of the cynical state of submission and lack of reaction." (2012, 175)

In this sense, "Turkish people" seemed to refer to the people in one's social circle or the people they knew around them - a reflection on "us" or "we" as people who had "accepted the way things were."

Thus, the question is raised as to on what level the experts I spoke with were self-aware about their own cynicism and on what level they perceived "Turkish culture" to be a "real" and bounded entity that had effects on the way the earthquake preparations played out. The posing of this question adds a layer of understanding to my interviewees as subjects as they are thus questioned as subjects who are self-aware and who have a relationship not only to their own stated beliefs, but their own possible cynicism. This may show how saying that there is "nothing to be done" may be a psychological mechanism in which people are more drawn to familiar narratives about themselves and what they can do, as opposed to the "fear" inherent in confronting this way of thinking, and in turn, the "real" political mechanisms that support the current lack of action. At the same time, in my fieldwork I found that some interviewees who drew attention and gave some credibility to these narratives were the same ones who also took action in their own lives that tried to improve the disaster preparation situation in the city. In this way, this observation may complicate the narrative as "cynical Istanbul residents" versus "people who refused cynicism and took action." However, as I will expand upon, only Osman of the interviewees also gave a political critique that opposed the cultural essentialism of the "Turkish people are fatalistic" idea. While some interviewees may have taken a lot of action in their own careers, they appeared to be holding onto some cynical views about their environment at the same time.

In another point within her theorization of Occidentalism, Ahıska makes the statement that the various power dynamics of the history of Turkey must be grappled with in order to re-orient Turkish national identity, since otherwise the temporal politics that are a part of being on the margins of both "East" and "West," as well as colonizer and colonized, will remain stagnant in time and trapped between these polarized constructions (2003). This seems related with her point about how elites in Turkey employ fantasies of "modernity" to propel projects in their own interests. Ahıska argues that such an emphasis on speed and progress without critically evaluating where Turkey stands in regards to modernity ultimately results in a type of inaction or immobility as well, since this drive to "catch the West" represents "speed without movement" (2003, 352). While on one hand the urban transformation projects embraced by the government seem to fall under this category, especially in their emphasis on the future and prosperity as mentioned in Chapter 2, Ahıska's point also seems relevant when considering how these fantasies can be opposed by non-elites. Osman's analysis, which is critical of many dynamics that are sometimes taken for granted, seemed to point towards the kind of critical stance that would be needed to be able to escape elite appeals that are based on a deliberate misunderstanding of history and power in Turkey. At the same time, his emphasis on the idea that it is not something rooted in "culture" but rather in the various aspects of political power, both currently and historically, that make preparation difficult also rejects a cynical idea of the preparation environment being difficult simply due to an essential "Turkish culture"; it also paves a way to re-consider how political power has been used by elites to influence sections of society with less power based on ideas of what "Turkey," "modernity," and "the West" might mean in a political and historical outlook.

It seems that, going forward, while there was more overlap in epistemological fields when I discussed issues of culture with my interviewees, the notions they employed may have harmful effects when considering possible futures for Istanbul earthquake readiness measures. "Turkish culture," left unclarified, may reify the people living in the country of Turkey today and may delimit possibilities for the future through its essentialism. It may, at the same time, draw attention away from the political, historical and economic dynamics that compose the city of Istanbul today and which have led to the current state of

preparation efforts. Whether these rhetorics were employed through cynicism or through true belief, as narratives that circulated in society either way, they had a negative and disempowering effect in both cases. As I cover in the final chapter, however, not only Osman but also Hüseyin illuminated some paths forward in terms of changing and improving how earthquake readiness is conducted in the city. By taking a critical approach to Istanbul's current actors and politics and by outlining possible actions that can be taken to affect preparation, they helped to break the impasse of cultural essentialism's inherent lack of action just as their proactive vision converted feelings of anxiety into preparatory action.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

In this thesis, I attempt to shed light on some of the conditions, opinions, feelings, and realities of experts working in fields connected to earthquake preparation in Istanbul. As experts, I attempted to learn something from their expertise in urban planning, engineering, architecture, and disaster management, while at the same time taking an anthropological approach to our interactions in our interviews.

In terms of the wider landscape that my interviewees were a part of, this thesis argues that "disaster neoliberalism" defined the current preparation efforts for a large earthquake in Istanbul. Drawing on both the work of Vivian Choi and Sumru Tamer and showing how their observations are similar in terms of the nationalistic elements of the situation, my idea of disaster neoliberalism emphasizes how responsibility is largely left on the shoulders of ordinary residents and individuals, and that it is largely based on class. In the same way, my point in the beginning of Chapter 4 is linked to this idea: while disasters always open spaces after their occurance and while the preparation for possible disasters can allow for productive action by some groups in society, in terms of the Istanbul case, this productivity only seemed possible for the largest and most economically powerful actors such as the state and large companies. This argument serves as a counterpoint to the larger trend in risk studies right now which is focused on how states, large institutions and some individuals profit from disaster or make it "productive," such as in the work of Naomi Klein and Caitlin Zaloom. My argument concerns the level of scale in this situation, since individuals were often left with less resources and information, and as such this risk was a financial burden in many cases as opposed to an opportunity. In line with David Harvey's thinking on this point, this structure poses particular issue to the most marginalized residents in the city as they also live in some of the least earthquake-resistant housing. Finally, I also tie in the idea of the "neurotic citizen" by Engin Isin, who theorizes the current status of neoliberalism as "neuroliberalism." The state governs its subjects through their anxiety and neuroses, which goes against the main figure of "risk society" as formulated by Ulrich

Beck. Instead of a "sufficient, calculating, responsible, autonomous, and unencumbered" subject, the neurotic citizen governs itself through its own anxiety; in this case, the anxiety about a possible earthquake is left to such individual "neurotic citizens" while the state does not provide as much assistance on such issues (Boyer 2008).

In the particular form of neoliberalism I outlined, disaster neoliberalism, members of universities and civil society organizations seemed to be pressured and negotiating to both take action within the disaster preparation field just as they needed to defend their work and their own position. I link this back to the oversized position of the state in my fieldwork, which was represented in some ways by the role of the greater municipality and AFAD when it came to the disaster preparations. While more research needs to be conducted as to the relationship between state institutions and Islamic civil society groups presently, this thesis shows that people within secularist non-governmental organizations felt blocked, pressured or ignored by the state insitutions at different levels of their work, depending on the mechanisms and particular interactions with various state institutions. In terms of scientists, they also had to navigate this complicated terrain as public figures who spoke to the media and by extension, the Istanbul population at large. Citing Joffe et al., this thesis adds to their arguments by demonstrating that Istanbul scientists also negotiated the line between under- and over-emphasizing the earthquake risk, but in the case of Istanbul they dealt with a more sensational media environment with many figures claiming to have "predicted" the earthquake. As residents and experts at the same time, my thesis shows that the prediction issue was "closer to home" for my interviewees, since they were making statements that would affect the city that they themselves live in.

At the same time, while the effects cannot be clearly discerned, due to the illiberal nature of the current government, it seemed as though experts also needed to temper their statements in order to conform to state interests at the same time in their comments to the media, such as not stipulating which neighborhoods were at a higher risk. This accompanies my argument concerning the role of the state in disaster neoliberalism: mainly that its priority seemed to be enabling companies to profit from massive urban transformation projects while offering little to ordinary residents in terms of information, guidance or resouces to

help prepare. The state also took on an outsized role in name with the formation of AFAD in 2009, and as I show by drawing on the work of Marlene Schäfers and Sumru Tamer, AFAD seemed to have played a part in the marginalization of civil society organizations as well. This research thus expands on their work in showing how the state-capital partnership is also part of a larger restructuring of the state through the centralization of state institutions. This adds an illiberal dimension to this form of neoliberalism, and shows how the state's attempts at gaining more hegemony and control also benefit the private companies aligned with the state. In this sense, the thesis demonstrates that while pre-disaster efforts may be lacking on the part of the state and suppressed when it comes to civil society organizations, the centralized mechanism of AFAD may help to ensure control of a post-disaster scenario in Istanbul in line with previous examples showed by Tamer and Schäfers, as well as internationally as shown by Klein in her description of disaster capitalism. In this sense, my fieldwork represents a change from the article surveying some of the dynamics of Istanbul earthquake preparation as covered by Elizabeth Angell (2014), mainly through the increased presence of and pressure from the state. Angell's overview on how the built environment of the city reflects, mediates and opens way for residents to address politics and government largely holds true for the time of my fieldwork as well; however, this thesis shows that my interviewees were working in a city with increased limitations and perhaps a more prominent sense of cynicism and humorous response mechanisms in order to deal with this change in conditions.

This thesis all represents an attempt to shed light on the ways in which affect and emotion have influenced experts by calling on the works of Dominic Boyer, Joffe et al., Sara Ahmed and Yael Navaro-Yashin. Another theme I highlighted was the status of the experts as people who were both professionals and long-term residents of Istanbul at the same time. In the context of forecasted major earthquake, this added an extra emotional dimension to their work and an to their stance as residents themselves. Thus, while part of their work involved strategic navigation of various pressures they were responding to in the disaster preparation field, which is typically understood as something "rational," emotion also affected their work and played a part in our interviews as well. As demonstrated by Joffe et al. and as was also the case in my findings, scientists used the emotional boundary work of

stigmatizing certain other researchers in order to privilege long-term forecasting over short-term prediction of earthquakes. In our interviews, the use of humor by experts seemed to be a way in which they maintained a professional demeanor with me, which was important for the performance of expertise. Humor or laughing provided a way to regulate that performance instead of showing more negative or "maudlin" emotions since it may have served as a "release valve" for other emotions (Kuipers 2008). At the same time, this "joke-work" seemed to help cope with a political system that seemed illogical or counterintuitive, in part due to its illiberal aspects. It may have helped with fostering in-group feeling as well. On the other hand, Navaro-Yashin's description of cynicism as a popular affective positionality may also be applied to the humor and joking employed, especially when such jokes failed to address the political system or when their premise was that the situation would not change. This went along with the theorization by Trnka that laughter may have acted as a substitute for a closer emotional or critical evaluation of the topic (2011).

Additionally, this thesis demonstrates how my interviewees reacted emotionally to these points of difference regarding preparation. Drawing on theories of affect developed by Sara Ahmed and applying them to the case of experts, this thesis showed how this difference sometimes made them affectively alienated compared to the people close to them, such as friends and family. They confronted the cynicism dominant in the current environment (as described by Yael Navaro-Yashin and employed as a theory in this research) by taking action and by pointing out political dynamics that can change and improve in the future, such as comments by Osman and Hüseyin that citizens and civil society groups can pressure government institutions. This point about experts' emotional and affective positionality and subjectivity is important when we consider how experts face many challenges in fields such as earthquake preparation. For instance, they emotionally face not only the possibility of a disaster, but also their own "otherness" in comparison to the many people who would rather respond with inaction or denial. Just as experts perform boundary work in a way that takes social and emotional factors into account, experts' emotional dispositions towards the earthquake risk play an important role in showing both how they seemed to be the ones who motivated others around them to prepare. At the same time, it is

imporantant to note that they also took an emotional burden through their affective distance from the majority.

Finally, I explore the frequent occurance of an idea that it is a "Turkish" trait to be fatalistic and to fail to take preparatory action for a future disaster. I argue that this idea by itself may have a negative effect on preparation as it is based in an idea of "culture" and thus may be essential and unable to be changed. Referring to theories by Meltem Ahıska, this thesis also argues that such an idea may also be harmful due to the ways in which elites may benefit from the decreased motivation and action that accompanies this notion based in how "Eastern" people behave on an essentialist level. It also may represent a particularly rhetorical cynicism as studied by Navaro-Yashin and referenced previously.

Despite these more cynical or inactive approaches, as individuals, my interviewees participated in earthquake preparedness activities both through jobs and often as volunteer activities and hobbies. Many of the experts I spoke to displayed their personal commitment to this issue, and spoke about things they wanted to do in the future on this issue, from writing books, attending conferences, giving more trainings, conducting future international research, and conducting new surveys of Istanbul neighborhoods. At a time when there has been much discussion about the "right to the city" on the part of its residents, the experts and activists I spoke with offered labor and emotional stances that worked to combat helplessness, cynicism and inaction concerning this issue, and they did this despite the new pressure and lack of space to act within the preparation field due to the encroachment of the state. The issues outlined in this thesis paint a picture of some substantial issues concerning earthquake preparation in the city, and various forms of inaction due to the current structure of the state under the state-capital partnership and disaster neoliberalism. Through understanding more about this inaction and the way in which it is approached in the city today, I have attempted to demonstrate some gaps to be filled and thus some ways forward to both understand the experts working on these issues as well as the preparations themselves. As my interviewee Hüseyin said at the end of our interview, the phrase should not be "yapacak bir şey yok" (there is nothing to be done) but rather "yapacak çok şey var"

(there are many things to do) in regards to working towards the creation of a city and its buildings that are safe for all Istanbul residents.

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