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## **In-between Anxiety and Hope: Trusting an Alternative Among ‘Alternatives’ in the (Post) Organic Food Market in Turkey**

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### **Abstract.**

**This paper argues that in Turkey there are plural alternatives within the alternative food channels and even in the recently emerging post-organic movement, by offering comparative cases from largely ignored international literature on alternative food initiatives. It examines a growing consumer food cooperative, a popular natural food store, and a well-known organic farmers’ market in Turkey, which together are considered the most prominent alternative food channels in İstanbul by varying consumer segments. It interrogates the hows and whys of what becomes a reliable alternative and for whom in this recent complexity. This research is based on thirty in-depth interviews with the consumers and producers of İpek Hanım’s Farm, Feriköy Organic Farmers’ Market, and Kadıköy Cooperative. It reveals that food anxiety, trust, and hope appear as crucial dynamics of alternative relationships in the organic and post-organic food market in Turkey. These affects are visibly influenced by the social, cultural, and economic capital of consumers and interlinked with the meanings consumers attribute to their food practices. These meanings are dynamically (re)constructed through certain trust-building strategies and discourses of the ‘alternative’ which are presented by various actors (producers, marketers, cooperatives) and the ways consumers negotiate them. This study also suggests that consumers’ varying forms of food anxiety and relationship to each alternative have different repercussions in terms of social and political visions about alternative food initiatives. The major difference is derived from**

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**whether they prioritize their bodily health with the mentality of 'neoliberal governmentality' or share some political ambitions and hope for transforming collectively the current agri-food system.**

**Word Count:** 9886

## **INTRODUCTION**

We have been experiencing a food regime that has been sustained since the 1980s through reduced farm supports, privatization of public services, which has, in turn, privileged transnational corporations and agribusinesses and pressured small farmers (McMichael, 2013, p. 77). It also degrades the ecosystem via genetic modification of animals and the patenting of re-engineered plants and seeds (Bernstein, 2016, p. 627). Organic agriculture became a considerable movement in late 60s in the USA by criticizing this very rise of industrial agriculture and agribusiness. The movement was also supported by agricultural scientists who were building trust in food within the regulatory structure behind the 'organically grown' label (Goodman and Goodman, 2007, p. 26). While organic production has been rising significantly in the Global North and some developing countries such as Turkey, new forms of production and the distribution of ecological/natural food have also been emerging as a reaction to the severe socio-economic and ecological consequences of conventional agriculture as well as the supermarket sales of the industrial food. Many of these varying food channels also have risen as a reaction to the organic movement. The 'post-organic'<sup>1</sup> movement thus defines itself with the argument that the organic movement has been conventionalized, criticizing the movement for having a 'technologically-led vision' (Buttel, 1997, p. 355) that only considers the use of 'allowable inputs' (Goodman and Goodman, 2007, p. 24) and the production of niche products (Buck et al., 1997, p. 8), but not fair labor relations nor consumers' accessibility to food (Goodman and Goodman, 2007, p. 24). They also assert that its organic standards empower corporations—in this case, organic agribusinesses—to the detriment of small farmers, thus indicating their inevitable incorporation into mainstream capitalist accumulation (Guthman, 1998; Jordon and Shuji, 2004). Therefore, the post-organic movement argues that the organic movement is no longer a strong transformative alternative solution. Moore (2006), however, suggests analyzing these movements from a more dialectic and less binary perspective (p. 25). He sees that the post-organic movement both intersects with, and distinguishes itself from, the organic movement and indeed reconstructs itself through this very "dynamic tension in the (discursive) field, between conventionalization and movement cosmology" (p. 33). The emphasis on this dynamic tension is valuable in understanding plural alternatives in the post-organic movement.

Most of the actors in post-organic initiatives such as farmers' markets, (online) farm shops, and food cooperatives claim to empower small-scale farming and local food chains without requiring organic certification. They claim to offer alternatives through certain principles and values such as respect for ecology, small farming, sustainable agriculture, and healthy food. They mostly assert that the global commoditization of food has also led to urban/rural distancing and to our loss of both control of the land and knowledge of small farming. They challenge the production of 'food from nowhere' by claiming to provide 'a place-based form of agro-ecology' (McMichael, 2013, p. 156). Therefore, there are many scholars studying the emergence of alternative food networks (AFNs) "in the light of the 'crisis' of the conventional agri-food sector" (Sonnino and Marsden, 2005, p. 182) and as "modes of resistance to agri-industrial food systems" (Harris, 2008, p. 55).

However, the literature also suggests that AFNs are not uniform and conflict-free. There are questions of who benefits from these alternatives and who can implement alternative food production (Dupuis and Goodman, 2005, p. 364-366). It is essential to consider the relations of power present in these so-called alternative relations and the 'relational contingency' (Holloway et al., 2007) of what is presented as alternative because many alternative food channels reinforce the existing system favoring local elites and corporations but exclude many small farmers and most consumers from their 'alternative' commoditized bubbles. Many scholars debating AFNs also highlight the need for going beyond the divide between alternative and conventional, arguing that they are interlinked in many respects rather than being simply opposed to each other (Kneafsey, 2008; Sonnino and Marsden, 2005). Most producers in alternative networks also sell their products using conventional channels and many consumers in alternative channels make their decisions based on similar criteria used in conventional channels, such as the taste and the price of the food (Hinrichs, 2003). Therefore, we elaborate alternative food channels in this study not as being in an absolute dichotomy, but more as 'hybrid' (Watts et al., 2005, p. 34) entities having interlinked aspects with both each other and conventional agri-food relations.

The recent literature on alterity draws attention to some other important points that might be useful in analyses of AFNs. Mourato et al. (2018) suggests that we need to understand how alternatives evolve in interaction with mainstream systems, as well as influence and are influenced by whole processes of institutional change and social movements. We consider that this point needs to be given more attention in analyses of the evolution of AFNs. Another crucial point is made by Jones et. al (2010), suggesting that complex interrelations between ecology, food production/consumption, and capitalism need to be paid more attention in academic analyses and practices of AFNs (p. 95). We also care about the emphasis that Jones et al. (2010) places on the need for rethinking alternative food networks as socio-ecological systems in order to properly evaluate their alternativeness. Thus, we try in our research to analyze ecological dimension as well as social and economic aspects (e.g. their interplay with neoliberalism) in AFN relations, which are co-produced in 'meaningful AFNs' (p. 95-6).

## **TURKISH AGRI-FOOD CONTEXT AND VARYING ALTERNATIVE FOOD CHANNELS**

Neoliberal policies were incrementally adopted into the Turkish agri-food system throughout the 1980s and accelerated in particular after the enactment of the Agrarian Reform Implementation Project in 2001. The reform has had various effects: enforcement of direct income support as a recent policy, adoption of the 2006 Seed Law, the privatization of state's agricultural initiatives, and de-functionalization of cooperatives. (Keyder and Yenal, 2013, p. 198-200). During this period, transnational agri-food corporations have thus increasingly dominated the food market, including the organic sector.

The organic agriculture policies in Turkey started in 2004, with the enactment of the law on organic agriculture, as part of the EU harmonization process. In the same year, the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock delegated the control and the certification processes to independent control and certification companies. Along with the state support, organic production in Turkey increased almost fivefold from 2005 to 2017, reaching nearly 1,611 million tons.<sup>2</sup> Despite this rising volume of organic production and the popularity of organic food in Turkey, the Turkish organic market is still export-led. The domestic per capita consumption of organic food was only 1 Euro in 2014, whereas it was 118 Euros in France, 122 Euros in the USA, and 237

Euros in Sweden in 2017.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, only middle and upper-class consumers can access certified organic food in Turkey and this solely to a limited extent. The export-oriented character of the Turkish organic sector requires producers to meet European organic food standards; however, small-scale organic farmers are not sufficiently knowledgeable about the conversion processes, bureaucratic and technical requirements, and marketing relations. The Turkish government does not support small farmers in this process, while European countries have policies supporting marketing and processing as well as advice and training activities (Ataseven, 2014, p. 208). Additionally, support for organic products in Turkey varies according to the amount of land owned by producers. Thus, small producers cannot benefit from this support as effectively as big scale organic producers (Keyder and Yenal, 2013). The value of this support lessens when one considers the Turkish Lira, because certification costs are imposed in Euros and the Lira has lost considerable value relative to the Euro.<sup>4</sup>

The organic sector in Turkey is dominated by private actors, mainly private-run farms and corporate brands. Organic farmers' markets in Turkey emerged not only as an alternative to conventional food, but also to the conventional distribution of certified organic products in supermarkets and organic stores. To widen the domestic organic market in terms of the size, quality, and variety, the Buğday Association, in collaboration with other stakeholders, started the first organic farmers' market in İstanbul in 2006<sup>5</sup> and was followed by Slow Food and the EÜD Association with a couple of organic farmers' markets in İstanbul. There are also a few organic farmers' markets organized by municipalities. In all these farmers' markets, only certified organic products are allowed to be sold. However, there is no strict rule for accepting small-scale farmers. In addition to the small farmers, importers and intermediaries such as distributors and farmers' representatives are also allowed.

Post-organic initiatives emerged in this very context, only a few years after organic food became popular among economically privileged consumers. It is a very recent movement<sup>6</sup> in Turkey and appears to have mainly two 'alternative forms.' The first form consists primarily of private farms which assert to produce natural village products without having organic certification, with their emphasis on small-scale local agriculture and the importance of trust instead of a formal certification system. They mostly sell their products to consumers in big cities, mainly İstanbul, based upon their orders via e-mail or online shopping. Some of these actors have become very popular and been transformed into middle- and upper-scale enterprises for capital accumulation rather than being in favor of small producers in the region. They enlarge their scale by opening stores in İstanbul after becoming well-known, such as in the case of İpek Hanım's Farm. Also, there are some middle-scale private farms, such as Koçulu Dairy Products in Kars, which collaborate with participatory collective food platforms by selling their ecological products at more accessible prices, but also provide food both to mainstream channels and natural food stores like İpek Hanım's Farm. There are also small-scale ecological farms, of which most are run by back-to-the-landers, which also usually function by sending their products by cargo to İstanbul and other big cities. Some of them collaborate with food communities and consumer food cooperatives, because private distribution channels either do not offer fair prices or they search for organic certification as proof. There are finally some companies which market the natural products of private farms via online sale and their own logistics.

The second form consists of participatory, civic, collective actors being alternative food initiatives. These are food communities/collectives and consumer food cooperatives (e.g. Kadıköy Cooperative, BÜKOOP) that have emerged in the last decade, without pursuing monetary gain but instead only their own sustainability. Their main aim is to provide consumers ecological products

for more affordable prices and to support small-scale ecological producers who implement subsistence-farming by using local and ancient seeds but no pesticide, herbicide, or synthetic fertilizers. They have their own trust and surveillance mechanisms with producers, and do not require certification, unlike organic farmers' markets. They do not have intermediaries in their contact with producers and sometimes visit them in their production sites. Consumers are invited not only to buy products but to engage in the functioning of these collective platforms through participatory and horizontal relationships and democratic decision-making processes. Doing so, they aim to maintain alternative production, consumption, and distribution relationships which are not present in conventional relations nor even in most certified organic food and natural food channels. Despite being few in number, they also collaborate with some organic producers in their network.

<i>ORGANIC MARKET (Venues for Certified Organic Food)</i>	<i>POST-ORGANIC MARKET (Venues for 'Natural' and 'Ecological' Food)</i>
1. Corporate Actors (e.g. City Farm)	1. Corporate Actors (e.g. Tazedirekt)
2. Middle-scale Commercial Enterprises	2. Online 'Natural' Food Shops of Private-Run Farms at Varying Scales (e.g. İpek Hanım's Farm, Gündönümü Farm)
3. Small-scale Subsistence Farmers	3. Natural Food Stores (e.g. İpek Hanım's Farm)
4. Organic Farmers' Markets organized by NGOs and Public Actors (e.g. Feriköy Organic Farmers' Market)	4. Civic and Collective Alternative Ecological Food Initiatives (e.g. Kadıköy Coop, BÜKOOP)

**Table 1.** The Ideal-Typical Categorization of the Main Actors in the Organic and Post-Organic Market in Turkey<sup>7</sup>

Food communities have been getting together for ten years under the banner of Yeryüzü Association, the only NGO organizing such communities. There are now less than ten food communities in Turkey, but they have been gaining popularity, especially in the last few years, as they participate in almost every meeting and with an increasing number of food cooperatives in İstanbul. Finally, there are some consumer food cooperatives and coop initiatives in this alternative form. Seven have established themselves in two years, after the establishment of Kadıköy Coop in 2016. Despite their limited number for now, they have been expanding their impact through collaborations and regular contacts with each other and others in the field of agroecology, such as farmers' unions. They all aim to build solidarity-based and direct ecological relationships with small producers and operate through volunteering, based on collective decision-making and management.

While the word 'organic' is used by certified organic food producers in the organic market, the post-organic sector uses the words 'ecological' and 'natural'. The word 'natural' is embraced by private-run farms and companies, highlighting the natural qualities of food; referring to foods grown without the use of pesticides, herbicides, synthetic fertilizers, and preservatives. The word 'natural' is embraced by private-run farms and companies, highlighting the natural qualities of food; referring to foods grown without the use of pesticides, herbicides, synthetic fertilizers, and

preservatives. The word 'ecological' is used by food communities/cooperatives to emphasize a holistic approach to ecology (e.g. respect to whole ecosystem and biodiversity) that they consider ignored in the natural production being concerned only with the natural quality of food. Although these words are mostly used interchangeably by consumers, this distinction is made by producers and especially by activists in the post-organic food communities/cooperatives. We keep these distinctions throughout the text by following the word preferences of our participants in this research.

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study elaborates on plural alternatives within the alternative food channels and also in the post-organic movement. It thus provides quotidian realities and perspectives on varied 'alternative' food channels in İstanbul from both consumer and producer perspectives, to investigate the 'how's and 'why's of what becomes a reliable alternative for those in this recent but complex alternative food market. Considering the crucial role of discursive strategies in the production of meanings given to each alternative, it examines the discursive strategies of varying actors (producers, marketers, cooperatives) and the ways they are negotiated and sometimes reproduced by consumers. It asks: How and why does each alternative initiative gain the trust of certain consumers as the most reliable alternative food channel, but not others? What are the social and political implications of consumers' food anxiety and their respective relationship to each alternative?

This study investigates three different food channels in İstanbul, namely Feriköy Organic Farmers' Market, a popular natural food shop called İpek Hanım's Farm, and Kadıköy Consumer Food Cooperative. We examine these cases as visible instances of varying food channels to provide a comprehensive and comparative sociological analysis. We have chosen İstanbul as the location of our fieldwork for two main reasons. First, the consumers in İstanbul share significant food anxiety because İstanbul is the most industrialized city of Turkey "where social relations are much more removed from the interaction of the agricultural production of food than in the countryside or smaller cities, or even in other large cities (...) which still have an ongoing relationship with their rural hinterland" (Soysal Al, 2017, p. 68). This leads especially its larger middle and upper middle-class consumers to shop using these alternative channels. Second, it is a city where the number of alternative food channels and food activism are more diverse compared to the other cities of Turkey.

One of the cases studied in this research is *Feriköy Organic Farmers' Market* organized by the Buğday Association which is a pioneer NGO in ecological living. This case was chosen because it is the first and the most known of four different organic farmers' markets in İstanbul supervised by this NGO (4).<sup>8</sup> For cases of post-organic channels, we selected two different alternatives; İpek Hanım's Farm and Kadıköy Cooperative. *İpek Hanım's Farm* is a private-run farm which sells natural food both in its stores in İstanbul (3) and via email (2). It was selected as our case because it is a prominent example of these so-called alternative food channels in terms of its production capacity, product range, and the number of workers employed in the natural food production. Also, being the first online natural food shopping site in Turkey makes it popular to urban consumers. The other post-organic case we study is *Kadıköy Cooperative* as a civic and collective alternative food initiative (4). We selected this cooperative as one of our cases because it is the first consumer coop that is at the neighborhood-scale, and which aims to collectively transform the production, consumption, and distribution relations of food in favor of ecology, consumers, and small producers. It is an important case not only for getting the increasing attention of consumers, but

also because its one-year long experience motivated some other groups to start their cooperative initiatives in different neighborhoods of İstanbul with very similar models, principles, and functions.

This research is based on thirty interviews with the producers and consumers of these three initiatives: 10 interviews with consumers (5) and producers (5) of Feriköy Organic Farmers' Market, 13 interviews with Kadıköy Coop consumers (7) and producers (6), 6 interviews with the consumers of İpek Hanım's Farm and an interview with its owner. The consumers and producers of the farmers' market and İpek Hanım's Farm were recruited in the relevant shopping venues. As this store and farmers' market also have dining areas, we had the opportunity to socialize with them in these venues during our visits and then randomly offered some of them the opportunity to participate in our research. The interviews with the producers of the organic farmers' market are conducted with those who are available at the end of the day in the market. Other interviews with producers are conducted in their production sites, in eight different locations in Turkey. The fieldwork is also based on a one-year long participant observation at Kadıköy Cooperative. As we work as volunteers in the cooperative store, we had the chance to interview some customers who accepted our request. Other interviews with Kadıköy Coop consumers have been conducted, from January 2018 to January 2019, with volunteers who wanted to participate in this research. All interviews are recorded upon the consent of each participant and transcribed afterwards.

This research draws from the concept of 'neoliberal governmentality'<sup>9</sup> to discuss why consumers of particular alternatives share the pessimism of commoditized and individualized solutions, contrary to others who share collective hope for transformation. We also adopt Bourdieusian perspective to understand further why consumers trust and prefer certain things, what they expect from, and relate to, a particular choice among alternatives by addressing the role of the social, cultural, and economic capital consumers dispose.

This study contributes to the relevant literature on alternative food networks by offering a case from a location where organic and post-organic markets are largely ignored. It discusses this alternative market by addressing not only the alterity between the organic and post-organic market in this context, but also discussing in detail the plural alternatives in the post-organic movement. It is also interesting to investigate these cases in a developing country setting where neoliberal vulnerabilities that the current agri-food context brings are more acute for small-scale ecological/organic farmers and consumers than in the Global North where the support for organic and/or local agriculture is significantly higher.

## **CONSUMER AND PRODUCER PROFILES OF THE PARTICIPANTS**

Just as the alternative food channels are various, so too is the variety of consumer and producer profiles of these channels. From a Bourdieusian perspective, differences exist among the consumers of İpek Hanım's Farm, Kadıköy Cooperative, and Feriköy Organic Farmers' Market in terms of their economic, social and cultural capital. In this study, the monthly household income of the consumers of İpek Hanım's Farm varies between 15 and 25 thousand Turkish liras, while it varies between 5 and 15 thousand liras for the consumers of the organic farmers' market. The household income of the consumers of Kadıköy Cooperative is similar to those of the organic farmers' market, although its volunteers have lower household income compared to the others. However, there is still not a significant difference between the household incomes of these consumers that can place them directly into different economic classes. Therefore, we consider them to belong to middle and upper middle classes and not having significantly distinct economic capital. What differentiates them from each other is mostly their varying social and cultural capital.



Many consumers in this research have similar education levels —mostly bachelor's degrees— and they are mostly white-collar employees. Thus, rather than the education level, it is mostly their intellectual and political baggage developed through their interactions and learnings in similar ecological/political organizations which is significantly different in the consumer profiles of each channel. The political and researcher background of the cooperative volunteers helps them to position food as a political matter and to develop broader insights about the history of neoliberal transformation in Turkish agriculture. Other consumers of the cooperative also share their political concerns. For the consumers of other cases, however, it is the health and bodily concerns and the references of their friends which play a significant role in leading them to these alternatives. In other words, their food choice among plural alternatives is not only influenced by economic capital and simple cost and benefit mentality but also by their internalized dispositions and social network (Bourdieu, 1984).

On the part of the producers, the profile of Pınar Kaftancıoğlu, the owner of İpek Hanım's Farm, is visibly different from the others. She is an urban-raised, college-educated middle-class entrepreneur who has decided to try to benefit from a growing niche market. She has a social network by which she can create a demand for her products as well as the cultural capital through which she can share her confidence with her customers. The producers of organic farmers' markets and the cooperative also benefit from their social capital by making contacts with these consumer organizations. For the case of the cooperative producers, the contacts from their political engagements in other organizations such as ÇİFTÇİ-SEN (The Confederation of Farmers' Unions) are like the gatekeepers that facilitate their participation and integration in these networks. Most of them have entered the alternative food sector after retirement, to earn a side income. The producers of the organic farmers' market also differentiate from the producers of Kadıköy Cooperative, mainly in terms of their financial capacity to get organic certification.

## **HOW DO “ALTERNATIVES” BUILD TRUST IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF RISK AND ANXIETY?**

In the 'risk society', "the unknown and unintended consequences" of the industrial production (Beck, 1992, p. 22) increase various fears such as artificial fertilizers, growth hormones, chemicals, antibiotics and technological processing. These fears are strengthened everywhere in the absence of intangible threats on which experts do not present conclusive results. Yet, the anxiety is not experienced in the same way; it has a "socially, spatially and historically specific" character (Jackson, 2010, p. 150). Food anxiety in Turkey is strongly related to post-Chernobyl fears like cancer risk, as a closely affected country. This anxiety has incrementally been shared among consumers, combined with the acute neoliberalization of agriculture and food policies in Turkey since 2000. Consumers and producers have been increasingly pressured by the sovereignty of corporations, the decrease of the state support in agriculture, and significant food insecurity in Turkey compared to many EU countries.<sup>10</sup> The food anxiety of consumers becomes a strong burden in this context, as they are left alone to manage their healthy food-work as neoliberal citizens with an exaggerated individual agency (Hier, 2003, p. 3-20). It is becoming harder to deal with this situation, especially for consumers in İstanbul, the biggest city of Turkey, which is sharply distanced from the agricultural relations of food production. Thus, the search for trustworthy food channels becomes a visible concern, so as to have a 'relative feeling of invulnerability' in this risk atmosphere (Hier, 2003, p. 12). At this point, the 'moral economy' and political economy of food intersect with each other (Jackson, 2010). Moral and ethical concerns,

trust, reciprocity, and obligations are closely related to market relations and quite important as economic factors (p. 149). However, there is no single, objective way for enhancing trust. While consumers seek healthy products they can trust, producers provide various reasons to convince their customers why their method of production is the most reliable. They are involved in the 'manufacturing of meaning' of their products (Jackson et al., 2009, p. 12-24). Therefore, their discursive strategies and the ways they are negotiated are crucial in understanding the hows and whys of what becomes a reliable alternative food channel for whom.

All the participants in this research emphasize that they have limited or no knowledge on the food production processes, thus need the guidance of some expert knowledge and reliable information and food channels in their healthy food choices.

'Even when people who make analyses of what is healthy or unsafe are medical doctors, they do these analyses under the sponsorship of some corporations. Therefore, we are now talking about an information circulation, which is extremely open to manipulation. Choosing the more reliable source of information is the hardest part for consumers because of the intensity of false knowledge around.' (Deniz, Consumer of Kadıköy Cooperative)

Kaftancıoğlu builds trust in İpek Hanım's Farm through weekly emails to her customers, where she appraises her ethical values as a producer and the uniqueness and reliability of her products by a constant emphasis on their local and natural character. She also frequently highlights the distinctive character of Nazilli, where she grows her products and other places like Kars from, which she procures geographically indicated foods.<sup>11</sup> This emphasis is indeed a globally adopted strategy to empower small producers in newly emerging agri-food markets. However, locality cannot be directly considered to be a counteraction against the logic of global agricultural food chains. The narrative of localness turns into a trust-building mechanism that facilitates Kaftancıoğlu's capital accumulation, rather than being a mechanism in favor of the small producers in the region. Our fieldwork indicates that despite her benefiting from local and indigenous knowledge of her local community in the production processes, the compensation increase that the marketing of localness brings is not fairly distributed between the local community and Kaftancıoğlu.

This valorization of localness is usually followed by the emphasis on nature in the discursive arena. Rural areas are promoted as places where pure nature can still exist among the remnants of industrial occupation. Following this perspective, Kaftancıoğlu and the producers of the organic farmers' market give the impression that their consumers are a small fortunate group having access to the last remnant of pristine nature. Such an impression has a direct repercussion in narrative of their consumers:

'I believe that there is no more a safe soil in Turkey. But Pınar, the owner of this store, pays utmost attention to the safety of her land. For this reason, I trust her. She produces food on the very last remnants of safe land.' (Aslı, Consumer of İpek Hanım's Farm)

Likewise, Kaftancıoğlu appraises the taste, smell, and quality of her food, associating them with those in 'good old days' on her web page<sup>12</sup>:

'I am not concerned with proving my products. I just follow the same way our grandparents in these mountain villages produced for centuries the most organic of all organic products.'

My production is the same with how it has been done in these lands for thousands of years by real heirloom seeds and dung.'

The emphasis on the values of the past enables consumers to chase the dream of rediscovering the taste and quality that were experienced in a particular period of past times imprinted on memories. The revitalization of the memory of childhood is a prominent theme in the narrative of both the consumers of the organic farmers' market and İpek Hanım's Farm:

'For example, when I first started here, I found the taste of my childhood, the taste of food has been lost because of more chemicals or overproduction. I don't know. I found the taste of my childhood for the first time here. I cannot eat outside anymore.' (Betül, Consumer of Feriköy Organic Farmers' Market).

This nostalgia is not significant among the consumers of Kadıköy Cooperative. What makes cooperatives an alternative for its consumers and producers is not based on the promise of providing the 'perfect food' of the past but on a comprehensive set of motivations. This includes the political concerns about the vulnerable position of small producers in the market, expanding ecological agriculture, eliminating intermediaries from the distributional mechanisms, and reaching healthy food more easily. In other words, instead of being stuck in the past, they rather aim to build the political alternative both in the present and the future through solidarity and struggle.

'The hope is here. I am fully sure of it. If some things are going to change, this will certainly be from here and through such cooperatives. Food communities, associations and unions, all of them have valuable efforts. We will all bring this change together by becoming a part of it. But I think we have this significant potential only and only if we work altogether.' (Gökçe, Volunteer of Kadıköy Cooperative)

The consumers of Kadıköy Cooperative mostly rely upon the references of the confederation of farmers' unions and the regular field trips of cooperative volunteers. They select producers according to certain criteria and principles they adopt collectively. This collective decision-making and direct communication with producers strengthen their trust in producers and their products. Most consumers in organic farmers' market and İpek Hanım's Farm trust these food channels most because they consider them as the proper way of protecting their health. Many consumers also highlight that they started to buy from these channels after a serious health problem in their family or the birth of their children. For the consumers of the organic farmers' market in Feriköy, the existence of Buğday Association in their organization is a great source of trust. For the case of İpek Hanım's Farm, the fact that Pınar Kaftancıoğlu is a mother increases the trust of mothers who shop from there for their children. They do not trust certified organic products, thus do not shop from organic farmers' markets: 'They get the organic certification for their agricultural field of 1 acre, yet promote as organic all their products as organic that are grown in 10 other acres not certified as such' (Zeynep, Consumer of İpek Hanım's Farm). The narratives of consumers and producers run parallel and the anxiety present in these discourses involves "a process of Othering where people's own anxieties are displaced on to variously-defined Others" (Jackson, 2010, p. 160). Positioning İpek Hanım's Farm as opposed to other organic food channels, Kaftancıoğlu, for instance, explains on her website why it is hard to develop trust in certified organic food:

‘In order to get this certification, you have to apply to third party certification institutions, and it is enough to show them the land on which you implement your organic agriculture. You can produce organic agriculture on certain agricultural land, get your certification, and sell your ‘awkward’ products that you grow somehow along with products from other lands, hiding this reality behind your certification.’ (Kaftancıoğlu, Owner of İpek Hanım’s Farm)

As Jackson suggests (2010), our interviews indicate that “anxiety might then be defined as a social field that can be occupied by many different social actors” (p. 160). It seems that İpek Hanım’s Farm as a natural food provider and organic farmers’ markets as the marketplace for certified organic food apparently compete with each other while presenting themselves as the more reliable ‘alternative’. A quote from a producer in Feriköy Organic Farmers’ Market reveals this competition:

‘There are still certain people, certain producers who destroy “organic” and play a trick on organic food to promote their food (...) A man comes up and makes news to shake the confidence of people in organics. Then people start saying ‘I don’t trust organic food anymore.’ The producers also deal with these people’ (Serhat, Producer of Feriköy Organic Farmers’ Market)

The regular consumers of İpek Hanım’s Farm and organic farmers’ market reveal that they feel so anxious when they need to shop from somewhere else, because they automatically consider these foods potential health threats. This emphasis on the ‘individualized risk of illness’ is criticized by many consumers of Kadıköy Coop. Relatedly, their anxiety is strongly expressed through another ‘otherizing’ process which problematizes the anxieties of many natural and organic food consumers as blind to social and ecological threats in food relations. They also feel anxious but the food anxiety they feel manifests itself in a different form than that felt by the consumers of İpek Hanım’s Farm and the organic farmers’ market. Instead of being felt at the level of health concerns, their anxiety is mostly expressed at the level of political concerns. These concerns are related to ecological destruction as well as socio-economic injustices in the food system against small-scale producers and consumers. Jackson (2010) suggests that “anxiety is not wholly negative in its social effects” and “may provoke creative and inventive responses” (p. 154). From a similar standpoint, the consumers of Kadıköy Cooperative do not consider this alternative initiative to be another ‘option’ among many others. Rather, they see it as an alternative which tries to challenge and replace the existing food system.

‘After all, the idea for such an organization emerged after the Gezi resistance. So, of course, I consider it very important. I always support such initiatives where small producers are empowered in a system where there are no intermediaries. I am always against the capital and take the side of cooperatives as they are really important for the survival of small producers.’ (Ceyhan, Consumer of Kadıköy Cooperative)

In addition, the consumers of Kadıköy Cooperative do not necessarily search for organic certification as proof and believe that it is an economic and bureaucratic obstacle for small producers:

'Producing organically is very expensive and the government imposes some rules that small producers cannot follow (...) I do not care about the certification here. For me, what is important is the cooperative itself rather than the certification. We need to support such initiatives.' (Pinar, Consumer of Kadıköy Cooperative)

## **SEARCHING FOR HOPE, OR PESSIMISM OF COMMODITIZED SOLUTIONS?**

The shift from welfare state towards the free market capitalism began in the 1970s is coupled with discourses on the freedom of consumer choice for individual welfare rather than the need for state regulation for citizen welfare. Rose uses the notion of 'privatization of risk management' (1996, p. 58) to explain that the citizens are today defined "as active individuals seeking to 'enterprise themselves' to maximize their quality of life through acts of choice" (p. 57). Thus, in the neoliberal era, enabling food security appears mostly as a form of 'neoliberal governmentality,' which expects consumers to be self-conscious and self-regulating (O'Malley, 2004; Doyle, 2007) regarding risks (MacKendrick, 2011). In an atmosphere marked by the rise of risk discourses and the expansion of alternative food channels, the neoliberal ideology encourages us to take the individual responsibility of choosing proper products for our health and safety. The neoliberal governmentality is not directly imposed, 'but operates through the embodied actions of free subjects—often by exercising choice in the market' (Cairns and Johnston, 2015, p. 156). Sezin's narrative exemplifies this:

'It is the citizens who are responsible. Everything is gone today, both animal husbandry and agriculture. So, we try to find alternative ways as individuals. After the appraisal and recommendations of my friend, I said "Ok, I will try this one too."' (Sezin, Consumer of İpek Hanım's Farm)

This 'hopeless' perspective of 'everything is already gone' is indeed very frequent among the consumers of İpek Hanım's Farm and the organic farmers' market. One of these consumers, Fatma, simply reveals the logic of neoliberal governmentality internalized by many consumers, which strengthens the neoliberal market: 'We need to decide according to our own mind. This is nobody's responsibility but ours.' (Fatma, Consumer of İpek Hanım's Farm). These consumers, including the ones who mention the state's responsibility to change its agricultural policies, do not consider themselves as agents in this change.

'In developed countries like in Europe, states have some responsibilities (...) Yet, it does nothing in this area like in others. So, we need to manage this (...) We can do something only by shopping from this shop. We cannot revolt to shout that 'agriculture is in a terrible situation' right?' (Elif, Consumer of Feriköy Organic Farmers' Market)

Adopting the position and practices of 'neoliberal governmentality' in their food practices, most consumers of İpek Hanım's Farm and the organic market do not get involved in a detailed discussion on the policies behind the existing state of the agriculture but tend to complain about the current functioning of agriculture and the unsafe food quality. They only emphasize visibly the role of consumers in making proper choices. Framing food practices in the private sphere, most consumers are not engaged in any political action to change existing agri-food relations, contrary to the cooperative consumers. They mostly adopt a hopeless perspective which is accompanied

with a constant emphasis on the loss of taste and smell of the foods in past, with a nostalgic state of mind. Thus, they dream for a ‘back to past in the future’ instead of engaging the imagination and the reconstruction of an alternative future. In this way, they try to make their nostalgia come true for them in the present by making ‘proper’ choices when compared to other commoditized options. We argue that their pessimism about the future of the agri-food system results significantly from the ways they relate themselves to the present and the future. Their limited interaction and agency in their preferred food channel is decisive in this way.

The consumers of Kadıköy Coop consider the state responsible for adopting policies which are in favor of small producers, consumers, and ecology. However, they are reluctant to lose hope while waiting for state to take action. Therefore, they regard both the consumer and producer food cooperatives as crucial actors to push for the state and trigger change. Also, all the volunteers of Kadıköy Cooperative consider the unfavorable state of the agri-food system to be at such a point that there is no option but the need for collective action. They prefer seeing this as ground which motivates them to finally initiate a collective and practical struggle for changing the agri-food system, and for collaborating with other actors in agroecology. In other words, they share a wishful ‘anxious hope’ (Ahmed, 2010, p. 183), because rather than considering their anxiety in contradiction with their hope for transformation, they consider it as something that increases the possibility and the production of hope. It is for this reason that they regard the present state of agriculture ‘not at the expense of struggle but [as something that] animates a struggle’ (Ahmed, 2017, p. 2).

‘This terrible situation we have arrived at today also carries a potential to be diverted into collective action. People get together to say no to starch based sugar, to GMOs. They support Hopa Tea Cooperative in releasing producers from the constrictions created by the quotas of ÇAYKUR.<sup>13</sup> People come to the cooperative and say they also want to organize something like this. The number of cooperatives and food communities also have risen significantly. People have been developing more interest in local seeds. These very bad days will bring us to better ones. They have already been doing so.’ (Damla, Volunteer of Kadıköy Cooperative)

Bloch makes a distinction between false hope and true hope, defining the former as daily and personal hopes and the latter as utopian and revolutionary (Bloch, 1986, p. 2). The second, in that sense, is seen as a catalyst to direct our energy towards revolution. We do not consider the hope present in Kadıköy Cooperative as having a revolutionary character as in Bloch’s Marxist framing of revolution. Similarly, cooperative volunteers see their hope in the “act[ing] (...) rather than being a promise of what might come” (Ahmed, 2010, p. 191) after a revolution. Relatedly, they very often exemplify some ‘success stories’ in stimulating the change by ‘working things through’ (Ahmed, 2017, p. 2). One of these examples they constantly refer to is the cooperative buying ecological hazelnuts from a producer paying a fair price, 18 TL per kg of shelled hazelnuts in 2018 (2.7 Euros in June 2019), determined by the syndicate of hazelnut producers (FINDIK-SEN). However, in this market, producers usually have no other option to sell their products to Ferrero for only 11 TL (1.6 Euro) per kg in 2018, because of the absence of a protection mechanism provided by the state. The de-functionalization of cooperatives and unions, such as the Union of Agricultural Sales Cooperatives of Hazelnuts (FISKOBIRLIK), has put into a fragile position the producers of the Black Sea region of Turkey, which indeed has occupied an enviable position in world hazelnut production. The disadvantages are not only created for producers but also for

consumers who buy the kilogram of hazelnuts for at least 60 TL (9 Euros) because of the existence of many intermediaries. Sharing this vulnerable agricultural story for producers and consumers, the cooperative volunteers explain that the hazelnut in the cooperative is declared by FINDIK-SEN as sold for the fairest price in Turkey. They also highlight that this path to gradual change is not an easy one and what they have been 'doing' are still 'baby steps':

'When the wind is at our backs, we will gather masses on our side (...) There are cooperatives to which we provide a guarantee of purchase. There are other cooperatives which are encouraged by our existence (...) These have, in turn, empowered us significantly.' (Damla, Volunteer of Kadıköy Cooperative)

The producers that are part of the network of Kadıköy Coop also share the hope that it produces:

'Actually, this project can increase the potential of alternative agricultural relations. If there were ten cooperatives like Kadıköy Coop, I would continue this production, not give up (...) After all, the problem is that we are not a collectively organized society either in agriculture or in any other areas. When we are organized as producers and consumers, nobody can freely tread on us. Say that the number of such cooperatives became 10, 20, 30, and even 100 and that they would build a head organization like a confederation of consumer cooperatives. Just think how much this could empower us.' (Ayhan, Producer of Kadıköy Cooperative)

'They bring us the hope to transform current agri-food relations. We live in a world where we cannot manifest ourselves as a unified power (...) That is why I perceive every single attempt, every little task as important progress. I take the emergence of such small alternatives very seriously. We are not yet strong enough, but we are indeed more crowded than it seems. And the number of actors in collective networks is growing every day. Looking solely from the global perspective may lead to overlooking many things. It is mostly such seemingly unimportant things which carry the significant potential and power to develop the alternative future.' (Birnur, Producer of Kadıköy Cooperative)

Such civic and participatory collective alternatives are ambitious with their hope for transforming current agri-food relations for peoples' food sovereignty.<sup>14</sup> The scope of this paper does not allow discussing in detail whether their efforts to widen their cause into larger segments of society will help in the struggle for food sovereignty. However, it is clear that they visibly differentiate themselves from other post-organic initiatives in Turkey with this ambition, hope, and related efforts.

Alternative food initiatives need to divert anxiety into a means of collective movement by demanding equal access to safe and healthy food and advocating for sustainable ecological small farming, considering the whole ecosystem and biodiversity. It is the time to start to demand 'food sovereignty' now in AFNs, despite being 'at the bottom of the ladder'. AFNs need to distinguish this alternative vision as a 'meaningful' one (Jones et al., 2010) in this complex food system where there are lots of so-called 'alternatives' that have no or little motivation and impact for transforming social, economic, and ecological dimensions of the current agri-food system.

## CONCLUSION

In Turkey, the organic food sector emerged as a response to the harmful effects of the industrial agriculture, especially after the 2000s. However, this sector has not been able to become an effective solution for small-scale producers. It rather empowers corporations and big-scale producers in Turkey because of the fees and standards imposed by the certification bodies. It is also largely inaccessible to economically unprivileged consumers. This thus led to the rise of post-organic initiatives which do not name their products as organic nor guarantee the quality of their products through the organic certification system. The local and natural character of their products are the common themes highlighted in their marketing strategy. Their critique of the industrial system and organic movement are also used as arguments to reconstruct their alternativeness. Yet, the post-organic movement is far from being a homogenized whole. There are plural alternatives even within the post-organic movement.

In this study, we investigated the complicated nature of these alternatives, namely at Feriköy Organic Farmers' Market, Kadıköy Cooperative and İpek Hanım's Farm. We address in detail how and in what ways each alternative constructs both its alternative position and the reliability of its own alternativeness among many others. We argue that the trust appears at the very center of building alternativeness because consumers desire to get rid of the sense of vulnerability by relying upon certain actors in the risk society. The social, cultural, and economic capital as well as the affective world of consumers greatly influence the preferences and the ways consumers trust and are involved in these alternatives.

Trust is constructed through distinct forms of trust-building mechanisms that derive from macro to individual motivations. The possibility of direct connection with producers and collective selection of products in the cooperative becomes a strong source of trust for them. The reliability of Feriköy Organic Market is mainly built upon the existence of the organic certification and the Buğday Association on the part of their consumers. The trust of the consumers in İpek Hanım's Farm comes mainly from Kaftancıoğlu's successful marketing strategies which appraise the local and natural qualities of her products as unique.

Furthermore, the research reveals that the anxiety is significantly shared among the consumers of each alternative yet manifests itself in distinct forms. Most consumers of İpek Hanım's Farm and the organic farmers' market are concerned with individual and health-related motivations. They thus try to deal with their food anxiety by managing their personal health as part of their strategies of neoliberal governmentality, based on their own reliable food purchases from among these alternatives. The cooperative consumers, on the other hand, do not simply associate ecological food with their bodily wellness. Purchasing from the cooperative, they try to pay attention to the crucial aspects of the agri-food relations — the fairness of labor relations and accessibility of consumers to ecological food, which they consider ignored in other so-called alternative and conventional food channels. They want particularly to be a part of the struggle that aims to change the existing relations of food production, distribution, and consumption. Unlike in the case of İpek Hanım's Farm and the organic farmers' market, hope thus appears as a strong affect shared by both the consumers and producers of Kadıköy Cooperative. This is closely related to the political meaning they attribute to this alternative in the present and for the future. Briefly, for consumers, the major difference is derived from whether they prioritize their personal health or the ambition and hope for transforming collectively the current agri-food system.

The hope in challenging existing agri-food relations has been increasing among the consumers of civic and collective alternative initiatives. It is because the number of such platforms has been rising at a significant pace in very recent years, though they are baby steps yet. We invite further



research in Turkey to study in detail the current functioning of alternative collective initiatives in terms of the transformative alternativeness they claim to offer and study their trajectory in the coming ten years.

#### Notes:

1. Moore introduced this term in a conference at Sligo in 2003, “to refer to farmers who appeared to be no longer following the example of earlier organic farmers but who were demonstrating their own innovative activities” and had considerable resonance (Holt and Reed, 2003, p. 285). His study on farmers’ market in the UK (2006) reveals how organic farmers started to describe themselves as ‘post-organic’ farmers, as they directed their primary focus into the importance of direct relationship with the consumers from certification requirements.
2. T.C. Gıda Tarım ve Hayvancılık Bakanlığı, “2005 Yılı Organik Tarımsal Üretim Verileri”, “2017 Yılı Organik Tarımsal Üretim Verileri. <https://www.tarimorman.gov.tr/Konular/Bitkisel-Uretim/Organik-Tarim/Istatistikler>
3. FIBL and IFOAM, “The World of Organic Agriculture: Statistics and Emerging Trends 2019”, p. 72-3. The latest data about per capita organic consumption in Turkey is available for 2014.
4. According to the data of European Central Bank in June 2019, 1 Euro equals nearly to 6,5 TL in June 2019. It was almost 4 TL in June 2017 and 2.90 TL in 2014. [http://sdw.ecb.europa.eu/quickview.do;jsessionid=782FBE71E90C841856120CF8468E08DE?SERIES\\_KEY=120.EXR.D.TRY.EUR.SP00.A](http://sdw.ecb.europa.eu/quickview.do;jsessionid=782FBE71E90C841856120CF8468E08DE?SERIES_KEY=120.EXR.D.TRY.EUR.SP00.A)
5. Ecological Farmers’ Markets, December 2018, <http://ekolojikpazarlar.org>
6. Differently from many countries in the Global North, organic and post-organic movement in Turkey has recently been emerging in intersection with each other only in the last two decades. The more participatory and collective form of post-organic movement is even more recent; rising especially after the Gezi Revolt in 2013. Kadıköy Coop is one of those networks rising in this very context, with the idea of democratic and participatory cooperatives emerged in forums after Gezi.
7. Despite the intersections and sometimes collaborations among these actors which are also addressed in this study, we provide this table to help readers visualize more easily the main actors in the organic and post-organic market in Turkey for the readers.
8. See Table 1. The numbers in parentheses in this paragraph aim to explain which categories these alternative food channels belong to.
9. The concept ‘governmentality’ is first developed by Foucault (1991) and elaborated further by various theorists (Rose, 1996; Dean, 1997) in framework of ‘neoliberal governmentality.’
10. Consumers in Turkey are constantly reading news about the return of the exported food products. These foods that do not meet the health criteria of foreign countries are consumed in the domestic market. <https://yesilgazete.org/blog/2017/06/30/rusya-20-5-ton-cilegi-geri-gonderdi/>  
The latest report of global food security index indicates Turkey’s overall score (based on criteria of affordability, availability, and quality and safety) as 64.1 over 100. This score is visibly lower than many countries in Global North such as the United States and UK (85), Germany (82.7), France (82.9). <https://foodsecurityindex.eiu.com/Downloads>
11. It is also interesting to note that the producer of this Kars cheese who initiated the project of promoting local Kars cheese provides food both to mainstream channels and natural/organic stores like İpek Hanım’s Farm and to consumer food cooperatives but he sells the same products at lower prices to cooperatives. This example shows that these initiatives are more like ‘hybrid alternatives’ (Watts et al., 2005) where alternative and conventional food relations cannot be sharply separated and are fundamentally related within an overall system (Hinrichs, 2003, p. 35).
12. The website of İpek Hanım’s Farm, December 30, 2018, [http://www.ipekhanim.com/ipek\\_hanim\\_ciftligi/sorular\\_%26\\_yanitlar.html](http://www.ipekhanim.com/ipek_hanim_ciftligi/sorular_%26_yanitlar.html)
13. The General Directorate of Tea Enterprises (Çaykur) was established as a state-owned enterprise to support tea agriculture with generous support purchases. It became an establishment of Turkish Ministry of Agriculture in 2002 and has recently been handed over Turkish Wealth Fund. It continues its purchases but only to a certain extent with daily quotas, in line with the neoliberal policies in Turkey. <http://caykurtr.com/NewPage/100/1/History.aspx>

14. See the declaration of La Via Campesina, the progenitor of food sovereignty. Via Campesina. 1996. "The right to produce and access to land." <http://www.acordinternational.org/silo/files/decfoodsov1996.pdf>. Also see the critical literature on food sovereignty, especially the special issues of the *Globalizations* and the *Journal of Peasant Studies*.

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