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NEOLIBERALISM AND POST-POLITICS

MASTER'S THESIS

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ABSTRACT

NEOLIBERALISM AND POST-POLITICS

This M.A. thesis seeks to investigate the influence of neoliberalism on politics and society's perception of political dynamics. Critics argue that politics has primarily catered to market interests within the neoliberal system, neglecting the broader populace and fostering depoliticization. This lack of responsiveness to the public's political demands has led to dissatisfaction. The research aims to comprehend this post-political environment by addressing questions such as: "What happens when certain political demands diverge from neoliberal state interests? Are they marginalized from the political sphere? Is there still room for alternative approaches? Does this environment nurture democracies, or does it pose a threat?" The thesis examines the structures and history of the European Union and Turkish presidential system, employing a post-political theoretical framework, and incorporates an analysis of contemporary cinematic works. Additionally, the thesis aims to explore potential solutions to overcome post-politics. The recent rise in extremism and inequality is linked to post-politics, underscoring the necessity of examining existing political impasses and the crisis of neoliberalism. This thesis advances the literature by comprehensively examining the impact of neoliberalism on politics. It uses a variety of data sources, including journal articles, books, newspaper articles, political discourse and films. The findings illuminate the transformative effects of neoliberal policies that prioritize individualism, competition, and market mechanisms over collective interests. This prioritization has led to the depoliticization of the economy and the transformation of politics into a consensual technocracy, limiting the pursuit of alternative approaches.

Key Words: Neoliberalism, post-politics, democracy

Date: 19.02.2024

ÖZ

NEOLİBERALİZM VE POST-POLİTİKA

Bu yüksek lisans tezi, neoliberalizmin siyaset ve toplumun siyasi dinamikleri algılayışı üzerindeki etkisini araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Araştırmacılar, neoliberal sistemde siyasetin öncelikli olarak piyasa çıkarlarına hizmet ettiğini, geniş halk kitlelerini ihmal ettiğini ve depolitizasyonu teşvik ettiğini savunmaktadır. Halkın siyasi taleplerine cevap vermedeki bu eksiklik memnuniyetsizliğe yol açmıştır. Araştırma, şu soruları ele alarak bu post-politik ortamı kavramayı amaçlamaktadır: “Bazı siyasi talepler neoliberal devlet çıkarlarından farklılaştığında ne olur? Bu talepler siyasi alandan dışlanıyorlar mı? Alternatif yaklaşımlar için hala alan var mı? Bu ortam demokrasileri besliyor mu, yoksa onlara bir tehdit mi oluşturuyor?” Tez, post-politik bir kuramsal çerçeve kullanarak Avrupa Birliği’nin ve Türk başkanlık sisteminin yapılarını ve tarihlerini incelemekte ve çağdaş sinema eserlerinin bir analizini içermektedir. Ayrıca tez, post-politikanın üstesinden gelmek için potansiyel çözümleri keşfetmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Aşırılık ve eşitsizliğin son dönemde yükselişe geçmesi post-politika ile ilişkilendirilmekte, mevcut siyasi çıkmazların ve neoliberalizmin krizinin incelenmesi gerekliliğinin altı çizilmektedir. Bu tez, neoliberalizmin siyaset üzerindeki etkisini kapsamlı bir şekilde inceleyerek literatüre katkıda bulunmaktadır. Dergi makaleleri, kitaplar, gazete makaleleri, filmler ve siyasal söylem gibi çeşitli veri kaynaklarını kullanmaktadır. Bulgular, kolektif çıkarlar yerine bireyciliğe, rekabete ve piyasa mekanizmalarına öncelik veren neoliberal politikaların dönüştürücü etkilerine ışık tutmaktadır. Bu önceliklendirme, ekonominin depolitizasyonuna ve siyasetin uzlaşmacı bir teknokrasiye dönüşmesine yol açarak alternatif yaklaşım arayışlarını sınırlandırmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Neoliberalizm, post-politika, demokrasi

Tarih: 19.02.2024

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| AK Party | : Justice and Development Party |
| CHP | : Republican People's Party |
| CJEU | : Court of Justice of the European Union |
| ECSC | : The European Coal and Steel Community |
| EEC | : European Economic Community |
| EMS | : European Monetary System |
| EP | : European Parliament |
| EU | : European Union |
| IMF | : International Monetary Fund |
| MPS | : Mont Pelerin Society |
| UK | : United Kingdom |
| US | : United States |
| WTO | : World Trade Organization |

INTRODUCTION

This thesis analyzes the impact of neoliberalism on political structures and societal perceptions of political processes. The research questions raised are:

- What happens to political demands that diverge from neoliberal state interests?
- Are such demands marginalized from the political sphere?
- Is there still room for alternative approaches in neoliberal contexts?
- Does the neoliberal environment nurture democracies, or does it pose a threat to them?

This study critically examines neoliberalism within the context of post-politics. It explores critiques of neoliberalism and seeks to understand the concept of post-politics to address its research questions. The study investigates the impact of neoliberalism, an economic term, on politics and its diffusion into political literature¹. The thesis employs this theoretical framework to examine the historical progression of neoliberalism from its inception to its expansion into the European Union (EU). Furthermore, the study extends its analysis to Türkiye, a significant partner of the EU. The aim is to establish clear and convincing connections between these subjects. Additionally, the conceptual framework is used to assess the influence of post-politics in films that have received acclaim at the Academy Awards and major European film festivals, like Cannes Film Festival.

The thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter focuses on neoliberalism, discussing its early manifestations in different societies, including an examination of its historical origins and initial practical applications in the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK). The chapter highlights the link between the spread of extremism and the exacerbation of inequalities resulting from neoliberal policies. Furthermore, it is argued that these effects can be observed in cinematic representations. This establishes a theoretical link to the following chapter by demonstrating that film is

¹ In this study, the term “neoliberalism” refers specifically to the economic ideology emphasizing free-market principles. It is distinct from “political liberalism”, which originates from thinkers such as John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and John Stuart Mill, and focuses on individual rights, democracy, and limited government intervention.

a valuable tool for examining societal perceptions of neoliberalism and post-political conditions, thus leading into the subsequent chapter.

The second chapter examines the central concept of this thesis, post-politics, and its effectiveness as a theoretical and conceptual framework for understanding contemporary politics and international relations. This includes contextualizing post-politics within the field of postmodernism and analyzing practical examples. The analysis begins with an examination of the EU's historical interactions. This analysis examines the EU's technocratic structure and historical development. Additionally, it explores the impact of post-politics on Türkiye, particularly evident in the adoption of the presidential system and its penetration into Turkish politics. The selection of the EU and Türkiye, as opposed to countries like the US or the UK, is motivated by several factors related to post-politics. First, the sui generis structure of the EU provides a unique political entity capable of implementing neoliberal agendas by displacing the influence of national sovereignty. The historical context shows how the rise of neoliberalism in the US and the UK strengthened the EU's domain, shaping its trajectory and policies. Moreover, Türkiye, one of the EU's largest trading partners and a candidate country, represents a particularly intriguing case study. Its political history as a relatively new modern republic is deeply rooted in notions of sovereignty. However, with closer ties to the EU, Türkiye has inherited neoliberal agendas, allowing for an analysis of their impact on its political landscape. Furthermore, this thesis observes a discernible trend in contemporary cinema, with a growing interest in what is referred to as “post-politics”.

In the final chapter, I aimed to propose potential solutions. After identifying the problem, I presented a strong solution and emphasized the significance of creativity. I demonstrated that solutions can be discovered even in cinema if we examine them closely. Examining the discourse and electoral outcomes of selected elections, I posited that politicians are aware of post-politics to varying degrees and employ existing solutions. However, it is argued that these solutions do not lead to lasting change, as neoliberalism ultimately prevails.

- Roots of neoliberalism

The opening chapter provides a concise historical account of neoliberalism, beginning with the Walter Lipmann Colloque in the late 1930s. This gathering of businessmen and select academics sought an economic framework that laid the groundwork for contemporary neoliberal thought. The legacy of this initiative continued with the founding of the Mount Pelerin Society (MPS) after World War II. Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, both key members of this society, significantly advanced the acceptance of neoliberal tenets and each received a Nobel Prize for their contributions. Their program, which emerged from the colloquium, advocated minimal government intervention and supported privatization, deregulation, and liberalization of financial and trade policies.

The inclusion of Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman in this study is justified by their pivotal roles in shaping neoliberal thought and policy. As key members of the Mont Pèlerin Society, they significantly contributed to the acceptance and implementation of neoliberal tenets. Hayek and Friedman's influence extended beyond theoretical discussions; for instance, Friedman was directly involved in applying neoliberal principles in Latin America. Moreover, Hayek's organization of MPS's meetings demonstrates their practical engagement with the dissemination of neoliberalism. Their works are therefore integral to understanding the development and application of neoliberal economic programs, warranting their inclusion in this analysis.

These collective efforts resulted in the practical implementation of neoliberalism, which was first observed in the US and the UK. In the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan enthusiastically embraced and implemented neoliberal principles. This period also marked the emergence of post-political trends, which were characterized by a significant reduction in state involvement in areas such as education, healthcare, and social welfare. Additionally, labor movements' influence was curtailed by government policies in the US, UK. Neoliberal programs are often presented as rational and neutral management of public affairs, rather than partisan public policies resulting from political deliberation. This depoliticizes the economy and hinders politics, leading to post-politics. The economic concept of neoliberalism is at the root of this issue.

Following the initial implementation of neoliberalism, some have suggested that we have reached the “end of history”, indicating a period of significant social transformation. This thesis aims to explore society's perception of neoliberalism, utilizing

insights from film studies. Cinema provides a nuanced lens through which to understand the historical trajectory of neoliberalism and its societal impacts.

- Cinema as a source material

Using cinema as a source in this thesis has several advantages for understanding society's perspective on neoliberalism. Firstly, cinema serves as a powerful medium for capturing and reflecting societal values, beliefs, and anxieties. Films often mirror the zeitgeist of their time, providing invaluable insights into how neoliberalism has been understood and experienced by individuals and communities.

Secondly, cinema has the unique ability to depict complex political and economic concepts in a visually compelling and accessible manner. Through cinematic narratives, abstract ideas such as neoliberal economic policies and their effects on society can be vividly portrayed, making them more relatable and understandable to a wider audience.

Additionally, films are not merely passive reflections of society but can actively shape and influence public discourse. Analyzing the portrayal of neoliberalism in films can deepen our understanding of the constructed narratives and ideologies surrounding it, and how they may have influenced public perceptions and policy debates.

Incorporating cinema into this thesis enriches the analysis by providing a nuanced and multi-faceted view of neoliberalism, making it more relevant and accessible to a diverse audience.

Therefore, the first chapter explores the intersection of cinema and politics, building on Siegfried Kracauer's analysis in *From Caligari to Hitler*. Kracauer argues that German expressionist cinema of the 1920s reflected societal anxieties and may have contributed to the acceptance of Nazi ideology. He suggests that films are a direct reflection of a nation's mentality, catering to mass desires and wielding significant cultural and psychological influence. This study expands on Kracauer's perspective by analyzing how contemporary cinema depicts post-political dynamics in society.

The thesis examines the relationship between the Gini index and increasing levels of inequality. The link between rising inequality and neoliberalism is widely acknowledged, and serves as a starting point for delineating the post-political landscape that sets the stage for subsequent chapters. The following sections will also discuss the

rise of extremist movements, which has received increased attention due to the prevalence of post-political paradigms.

- Framework of post-politics

The second chapter explores the concept of post-politics and provides a succinct literature review as a framework for applying the historical trajectory of neoliberalism and its spread in Europe and beyond. A philosophical framework derived from major thinkers is used to explore the concept of post-politics. Prior to this analysis, I presented a concise overview of postmodernism, which is a foundational influence on post-politics.

The concept of post-politics is related to postmodernism and can take on various forms. There are different interpretations, including Baudrillard's idea of trans-politics and Jameson's examination of late capitalism and its cultural logic.

After examining the post-modern qualities of the term post-politics, the analysis focuses on the works of Wendy Brown, David Harvey, Slavoj Žižek, and Chantal Mouffe. While there are numerous other scholars, such as Jacques Rancière and Zygmunt Bauman, their inclusion was deemed beyond the scope of this thesis. The most salient ideas for further analysis are identified for the sake of brevity.

This thesis examines the impact of neoliberal economic programs, as outlined in the context of the Colloque Walter Lippmann and Mont Pèlerin conferences, in conjunction with the contributions of Hayek and Friedman. The selection of Wendy Brown, David Harvey, Chantal Mouffe, and Slavoj Žižek is based on their seminal works that critically examine the effects of neoliberalism on politics and democracy. Wendy Brown's analysis illuminates the transformation of the state under neoliberalism, highlighting its impact on individual subjectivity and democratic institutions. David Harvey's critiques offer a comprehensive examination of the economic dimensions of neoliberal capitalism, emphasizing its role in exacerbating social inequalities. Chantal Mouffe's concept of radical democracy challenges the consensus-driven nature of post-political societies, advocating for a more agonistic approach to politics. Slavoj Žižek's analyses of neoliberal ideology provide valuable insights into its depoliticizing effects. By integrating these diverse perspectives, this thesis offers a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between neoliberalism and post-politics.

The literature review on post-politics synthesizes the ideas of four prominent authors. Wendy Brown argues that as the scope of state influence diminishes, the sphere of neoliberalism expands, treating individuals as economic entities rather than citizens. This has a pervasive effect on all aspects of life, eroding democratic institutions and individual subjectivity, ultimately undermining democratic values.

David Harvey presents neoliberalism as promoting individualism and Gramscian common sense. It is important to note that Harvey's perspective is from a leftist point of view. In his work, Harvey discusses the inequalities produced by neoliberalism and emphasizes the concentration of capital among economic elites.

According to Chantal Mouffe, neoliberalism has created a form of democracy that aims to eliminate potential conflicts, resulting in a “consensual” democracy. The lack of space for public deliberation with diverse perspectives creates a post-political environment where any remaining conflicts are reduced to a simplistic dichotomy of good versus evil, resembling a spectrum of adversaries. The “good” is defined as the trajectory of neoliberal globalization established by the US, IMF, and World Bank.

Slavoj Žižek argues that neoliberalism's belief in the inherent profitability of the market sidelines unprofitable ideas and depoliticizes economics. As a result, a technocratic framework replaces a political one, giving rise to post-politics.

- Examining post-politics

After establishing the conceptual framework, this thesis examines the historical evolution of the EU in relation to neoliberalism. It observes the transformation of the EU into a post-political entity. The initial spread of neoliberalism across Europe facilitated its harmonious integration into the EU. The EU's growing trade influence extended to one of its most important partners, Türkiye. Türkiye's adoption of neoliberal policies, closely linked to its association with the EU and the Customs Union, demonstrates the spread of post-politics beyond Western borders. This case highlights the impact of post-politics on countries transitioning from statist traditions to neoliberal frameworks.

Post-politics is a concept used to critique the unquestioned and seemingly sustainable reign of neoliberal culture, particularly in the West where it originated. This thesis explores the historical intermingling of the EU with the initial neoliberal

implementations of the US and the UK. The European Union (EU) is a model of post-politics by its character, as explored in the chapter, because of (1) its structure, designed from the outset as a technocratic polity, and (2) its challenge to sovereignty, which raises questions about its legitimacy and, thus, its democracy. The approaches of authors who address post-politics show us an erosion of democracy, a central issue for analysis. Therefore, the EU is an ideal subject for examination.

This thesis examines the case of Türkiye, because it provides a compelling example of a nation that rapidly implemented neoliberal policies after 2002. This shift in policy direction represents a significant departure from the country's traditional statist policies. The EU accession process, along with a constitutional amendment, played a pivotal role in this transformation. As a result, Türkiye's institutional structure, which is increasingly influenced by the EU's technocratic structure, is becoming increasingly post-political.

After examining the spread of neoliberalism and its crystallization in the institutional structures of different polities, the thesis turns to the social dimension of countries implementing neoliberal policies to elucidate the influence of post-politics on social dynamics. This includes investigating rising inequalities accepted by the masses, inherited bad working conditions, political elites' indifference to diverse political demands outside the scope of neoliberal rationality, and the diminishing social benefits among other factors.

In accordance with the theoretical framework established by Siegfried Kracauer, three films—*Triangle of Sadness* (2022), *Parasite* (2019), and *I, Daniel Blake* (2016)—have been chosen for analysis. The focus of this analysis is on the ability of these films to illuminate contemporary socio-political issues, particularly within the context of post-politics. These films, distinguished by their receipt of the esteemed Palme d'Or, the highest honor at the Cannes Film Festival, have garnered considerable critical acclaim and achieved significant global recognition. This selection is predicated on the Cannes Film Festival's pivotal role in European cultural production, where winning films frequently serve as emblematic representations of broader societal and political themes. The objective of this thesis is to examine the specific films in question in order to gain insight into the complex interrelationships between cinema, politics, and society, as exemplified by their recognition at Cannes.

Each film provides a distinct viewpoint or narrative that contributes to a broader understanding of how post-politics manifests in society. Their diverse themes, which range from inequality to social restlessness, precarity, and depoliticization, provide a comprehensive view of the complexities of post-politics. This makes them valuable subjects for analysis in this context.

There is a growing number of films dealing with issues of commodification, individualization, competition and other consequences of neoliberalism. Directors such as Aki Kaurismaki, Ulrich Seidl and those associated with the Greek Weird Wave are notable examples. These films have not only increased in number, but have also received acclaim at festivals and award ceremonies around the world, indicating a global interest in these themes. Post-politics, as a consequence of neoliberalism, is a phenomenon that transcends national boundaries, so this study makes an international selection of directors with a deep interest in social hierarchies, inequalities and political confrontations, such as Ken Loach and Ruben Östlund. Directors from Sweden, Korea, Britain, Spain and beyond offer a variety of perspectives and valuable insights into society's view of neoliberalism and post-politics.

- Neoliberalism and post-politics

The final chapter, which provides the thesis its title, examines the contemporary context. It demonstrates a discernible societal unease characterized by reduced political interest and a prevailing belief in the absence of viable alternatives. This observation aligns with the theoretical expectation of post-politics. There is a noticeable attraction towards extremist politics and a resurgence of right-wing nationalism. Moreover, leftist agendas have struggled to engage citizens with comprehensive plans, leading even neoliberal institutions to adopt anti-neoliberal rhetoric to maintain their influence.

However, there remains considerable support for the status quo, which complicates the search for a robust solution to the challenges posed by post-politics. One particularly practical approach that I find compelling is Mouffe's concept of radical democracy. It is elaborated in detail in this chapter.

To effectively challenge post-politics, it is essential to closely examine the electoral victories of anti-neoliberal political programs. In this chapter, I present three

significant examples that illustrate the potential of such programs to disrupt the status quo.

Brazil is a notable example where an extremist neoliberal agenda was defeated. Similarly, in the United States, the election results indicate societal support against the undesirable outcomes of post-politics, as argued in this thesis. In Türkiye, a radical democratic approach was used to challenge the prevailing post-political landscape.

CHAPTER 1. NEOLIBERALISM

The term “neoliberalism” has been occupying the world politics since the end of 1970’s. It’s been associated with the growing impact of the state on boosting the freedom of markets. Different scholars try to explore the implementation of neoliberal policies by focusing on various different factors like liberalization, deregulation, privatization, globalization, financialization, economization, marketization, monetization, individualization... While left-wing movements see it as a demon and try to find ways to diminish its effect, right-wing thinking usually embrace it and they try to improve its influence around the globe. For the left, neoliberal policies caused inequality and poverty among the people and certain people became more and more rich because of this unsustainable process. For the right, -which is the founding ideological camp- neoliberalism uses the maximum potential and increases the wealth. But it is usually seen as a threat for both far-right and far-left thought. It’s a threat for far-left because it gives a huge autonomy to the private sectors; a threat for far-right because it’s oriented on market interest more than “national” interests. In order for the reader to explore the concept of post-politics, this chapter delves into the origins and the meaning of neoliberalism.

What kind of a market interest does neoliberalism aim at achieving? Its objective is to reduce the state interference on various sectors that are traditionally seen as government sectors like health, education, social policy, energy, water, trains, education, roads and prisons etc. For example, privatization of electricity distribution in Türkiye would be really hard without neoliberal public policies in 1980’s. Türkiye’s public institutions used to do the job. Türkiye started to implement privatization as a part of neoliberal transition wave all around the world. Instead of the state itself, various electricity distribution companies started to compete to serve the people of Türkiye. In a neoliberal perspective this sector will become more competitive and, in the end, people will be served with a better quality than the old “cumbersome” state institutions. But for different perspectives, this argument cannot grasp the whole picture. For them, privatization will result in a competition among these firms only for their profit. The role of the public institutions will be diminished. Since they belong to the “public” and administered by the elected officials through a democratic process, politics won’t be as

important as it should be, as laid down in the next chapter, this is a post-political environment. This thesis tries to understand the neoliberal perspective and focuses on its criticism “post-politics”. The current chapter specifically examines neoliberalism.

This chapter delves deep into the term neoliberalism by following its history. Firstly, the chapter focuses on founding theories by Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek. Secondly, it continues with more practical examples from its initial implementation in the US and the UK (Thatcher and Regan eras). Following the theoretical and practical framework, the chapter traces the reflections of neoliberal culture in society’s outlook by underlining its impact in cinema. After this exploration, the chapter tries to understand the challenges and outcome of neoliberalism by focusing on various topics like green movements, left movements, extremists; inequality in wealth distribution, privatization, financialization, austerity policies. It argues that all these factors created a post-political atmosphere where politics is basically reduced to market interest.

1.1. WHAT IS NEOLIBERALISM?

The concept of neoliberalism is used to describe the transition in economic policies in the end of 1970's. Capitalist growth after the Second World War created a wealthy Europe –a “golden age” – and perhaps seemed like a never-ending story (Marglin and Juliet 2004). This era was marked by a liberalism with central planning, protectionism, and Keynesianism which neoliberals would rail against eventually (Turner 2007, 79). However, things started to change with the crises in the 1970's. This Fordist–Keynesian social compact in the postwar era -in other words, liberalism of the time- had to come to an end with “diminished growth rates, a wave of unemployment and cumulative inflation” (Duménil and Lévy 2005, 9) and crises like 1973 global oil crisis. This raised a question: How to save the economy? The answer was not actually “neoliberalism” at that time. But the term later used by many to describe the newly introduced set of solutions throughout the following years. Basically, neoliberal theory attacked Keynesian policy and government intervention in markets. It was ranging from a number of diverse ideas across economics and political science (Birch and Mykhnenko 2010, 4). It was a new kind of a liberalism. It was the continuation of liberalism with radical “improvements”.

What were these improvements? Although neoliberal policies were widely adopted after 1970's, its history goes back to late 1930's. The Colloque Walter Lippman in 1938 is an important milestone to understand these improvements because it was a key event in the origins of neoliberalism. It is an international congress that took place in Paris consisting of businessmen, economists, civil servants from different countries (Denord 2009, 45). Friedrich August von Hayek -who is an important figure for the improvement of neoliberal theory- was also a member of it.

The colloque aimed at revitalizing liberalism by establishing a new perspective which supports a brand-new look on laissez-faire, and it demeanes collectivism and socialism (Peters 2021, 3). The outcome was not some kind of a manifesto or a set of new policies. It was rather a discussion on the free market, the traditional liberal sense of rights and freedom and the degree and extent of state intervention. Some of the members supported the renewal of liberalism while others defended the “old liberalism” (Denord 2009, 49). Although the term was not specifically used, the Lippmann Colloquium was the theoretical birthplace of neoliberalism for authors like Jurgen Reinhoudt, Serge

Audier (Reinhoudt and Audier 2018, 3). Dieter Plehwe summarizes the Colloquium's definition of neoliberalism in four titles: (1) the priority of the price mechanism, (2) the free enterprise, (3) the system of competition, and (4) a strong and impartial state. In sum, neoliberals began to oppose the “unfortunate but irreversible politicization of economics and science” and sought to organize individualism (Plehwe 2009, 15).

This initial attempt to theorize neoliberalism represents the nucleus of what this thesis defines as “post-politics”, wherein politics becomes disassociated from economics and science. These scholars and thinkers from different countries and disciplines were attempting to devise a solution to the conflicts on the brink of World War II and the rise of Nazism. Ironically, however, they are now seen as responsible for many of today's conflicts by scholars who denounce neoliberalism as the cause of post-politics.

The selection of Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman as key figures for analysis in this thesis is justified by their influential roles in shaping neoliberal thought and policy. Both Hayek and Friedman were key members of the Mont Pelerin Society, which played a significant role in advancing the acceptance of neoliberal tenets. Hayek and Friedman advocated for minimal government intervention and supported privatization, deregulation, and liberalization of financial and trade policies. Their participation in conferences such as the Colloque Walter Lippmann and the Mont Pelerin Society meetings demonstrates their involvement in formulating and promoting neoliberal economic programs. Additionally, Friedman's practical application of neoliberal policies in Latin America and Hayek's organizational role in the Mont Pelerin Society underscore their significance in understanding the development and application of neoliberal economic programs.

Nonetheless, when did they start using the term “neoliberalism” to describe these revisions of liberalism? The next subchapter answers this question by focusing on Milton Friedman's seminal work, *Neoliberalism and Its Prospects*.

1.1.1 Concepts by Milton Friedman

The term neoliberalism was not widely used in the literature until Milton Friedman's essay *Neoliberalism and Its Prospects*. Friedman criticized the classical liberal understanding of laissez faire and described this new perspective as:

“Neo-liberalism would accept the nineteenth century liberal emphasis on the fundamental importance of the individual, but it would substitute for the nineteenth century goal of laissez-faire as a means to this end, the goal of the competitive order. It would seek to use competition among producers to protect consumers from exploitation, competition among employers to protect workers and owners of property, and competition among consumers to protect the enterprises themselves. The state would police the system, establish conditions favorable to competition and prevent monopoly, provide a stable monetary framework, and relieve acute misery and distress. The citizens would be protected against the state by the existence of a free private market; and against one another by the preservation of competition.” (Friedman 1951, 89-93.)

Michael A. Peters argues that this definition is not only the first presentation of the term on paper, but it also captures the main characteristics of neoliberalism and it is in line with the Lippmann Colloquium (Peters 2021, 3). In this essay, Friedman points that in classical liberal economic policies, state involvement was reduced but in this new revised understanding, state is a watchdog for market freedom because it is there to “police the system”. Later in 1976 he won the Nobel prize for “his achievements in the fields of consumption analysis, monetary history and theory and for his demonstration of the complexity of stabilization policy” (NobelPrize.org). His ideas were more prominent in academia and economics. He was a prominent figure in the Chicago School, which wielded significant global influence, particularly notable for its impact on the neoliberal transformation of Chile during the 1970s.

Friedman was a member of the Mont Pelerin Society (MPS). Friedman's membership in the Society, where he served as president from 1970 to 1972, is significant because the society played a prominent role in shaping neoliberal ideas and influencing the implementation of neoliberal policies (Shammas 2018, 1). This connection with MPS leads us to the next subchapter.

1.1.2 Concepts by Friedrich August von Hayek

Austrian economist Friedrich Hayek invited a number of scholars, economists, historians and philosophers to discuss and diagnose the flaws of liberalism after the Second World War in 1947. This group is called the Mont Pelerin Society (MPS). Influence of the Colloque Walter Lippman was evident in the meetings of MPS and 15

members of the Colloque participated in the founding meeting. It was an interdisciplinary society consisting members from different countries and professions. Along with scholars, there were journalists, corporate leaders, and politicians. They argued that the classical liberalism had failed. Therefore, their aim was to oppose collectivism and socialism, and to develop an agenda diverging from classical liberalism (Plehwe 2009, 5). They have gone further than the Colloque and are still active today. Their doctrine can be summarized as monetarism, supplyside economics, and minimal government; along with privatization, deregulation, and financial and trade liberalization (Plehwe 2009, 8).

Friedrich Hayek who was an exile from Austria, saw social democracy, exemplified by Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal and the gradual development of Britain's welfare state, as manifestations of a collectivism that occupied the same spectrum as nazism and communism (Monbiot, 2016). He pointed to the so-called dichotomy between human freedom and government authority and argued that all forms of socialism would lead to National Socialism and fascism. Perhaps, he was influenced by the events at the time. For him, the government ownership of the means of production in democracies would eventually result in coercion and dictatorship (Turner 2007, 73)

Hayek won the Nobel prize in 1976 "for their pioneering work in the theory of money and economic fluctuations and for their penetrating analysis of the interdependence of economic, social and institutional phenomena". Hayek's analysis was considered to be groundbreaking in its exploration of how these different aspects of society and economics influence each other.

Despite the theoretical advancements made by Hayek's analysis, the practical implementation of his ideas had unintended consequences, especially for scholars who oppose neoliberalism. While Hayek's work was influential in shaping neoliberal economic thought, critics argue that the application of his ideas in real-world policies led to outcomes that perpetuated inequality and social divisions. This discrepancy between theory and practice has fueled debates about the efficacy and ethical implications of neoliberal policies, contributing to ongoing discussions about the role of economic theories in shaping societies, namely the birth of post-politics.

The Nobel prizes awarded to both Hayek and Friedman, along with the impact of their theories in practice of the world politics, illustrate the significant influence that their ideas exerted on global politics.

Starting with the Colloque Lipmann, neoliberal thought began to gain momentum, a trend that accelerated with the founding of the MPS which was supported financially by millionaires and their foundations. Neoliberalism swiftly spread globally, particularly influencing policies in the United States and the United Kingdom. For instance, in the US, neoliberal ideas found a platform in well-funded think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation in Washington. Similarly, in the UK, the Institute of Economic Affairs in London played a significant role in promoting and developing neoliberal policies. Its impact was growing in academia as well; for instance, at the University of Chicago, where Milton Friedman dominated (Harvey 2005, 22). Dieter Plehwe emphasizes the importance of these meetings and networks. He refers to the various neoliberal movements collectively as the neoliberal thought collective.

“The architects of the neoliberal thought collective have carefully connected and combined key spheres and institutions for the contest over hegemony—academia, the media, politics, and business. Both the networking capacity in terms of specialization and the organizing capacity of the new type of knowledge apparatus—the neoliberal partisan think tank—need to be better understood in order to explain the rise of neoliberal hegemony and the transformation of policy research.” (Plehwe 2009, 22).

The dichotomy between collectivism and liberalism was evident in both Hayek’s and Friedman’s works and it was going to become the cornerstone of neoliberal ideology later. In sum, neoliberal agenda gained strength step by step through these networks since the 1947’s and was the dominant (post-) political program in the 1970’s.

1.2. RISE OF NEOLIBERALISM

Neoliberal theory started to be the most influential mode of discourse everywhere around the world with the influence of economists like Hayek, Friedman, and intellectual networks like Mont Pelerin. David Harvey summarizes this development as follows:

“The advocates of the neoliberal way now occupy positions of considerable influence in education (the universities and many ‘think tanks’), in the media, in corporate boardrooms and financial institutions, in key state institutions (treasury departments, the central banks), and also in those international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (WTO) that regulate global finance and trade.” (Harvey 2005, 3).

Neoliberal policies easily became hegemonic due to this massive influence. Its wide implementation started with the emergence of a neoliberal trans-Atlantic alliance between Ronald Wilson Reagan and Margaret Hilda Thatcher (Shammas 2018, 1). Their power did not solely stem from the robust neoliberal networks mentioned earlier but was also a result of the prevailing intellectual and cultural climate, or zeitgeist, which favored neoliberal ideals.

Unemployment and inflation rose dramatically with the stagflation crisis in the 1970s. Bretton Woods system collapsed in the beginning of 1970’s and the USA ended the convertibility of dollars to gold. This meant the onset of a different system with free-floating currencies and international capital flows (Birch and Mykhnenko 2010, 4). The time was ripe for implementing neoliberal policies to cleanse the economy of collectivism and socialism, as the colloque asserted, to safeguard citizens from state intervention through the presence of a free private market, as advocated by Friedman, and to depart from classical liberalism, which Hayek and MPS argued was the cause of the crisis.

Reagan and Thatcher implemented their neoliberal economic programs of deregulation, tax cuts and the privatization of state-owned enterprise (Reinhoudt and Audier 2018, 4). Their reign marked a shift from ideological political contestation to the use of market-based tools to achieve political and social goals which is basically what this thesis refers as post-politics (Chandler and Reid 2016, 2). The most prominent examples of the inception of neoliberal policies in the world, namely in the US and the UK, underscore how governments began to view people as consumers following the

implementation of neoliberal policies. “Consumer sovereignty” started to compete with major concepts in politics and international relations like state sovereignty. The next subchapters examine this transition in London and Washington by focusing on Reagan and Thatcher.

1.2.1 Neoliberal Policies of Margaret Thatcher

The economic problems, such as stagflation, which were discussed multiple times in the previous subchapter, were a significant issue in the British economy during the 1970s. It appears that the public was convinced to abandon the status quo, namely Keynesianism, which neoliberals defined as classical liberalism. United Kingdom witnessed a major shift in politics and economic policy when Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government replaced the 1974–79 Labour government. Thatcher was elected in May 1979. Her Conservative Party governed Britain throughout the 1980s. Her period marked the most vivid implementations of neoliberalism and her assertion “there is no alternative” (TINA) was going to be the motto of the upcoming years in economy and politics.

Thatcher's policies comprised the privatization of state-owned industries, the process of financial market deregulation, the constriction of trade union influence, and the reduction of public expenditure. They reflect her commitment to free market principles, limited government intervention, and privatization and they aimed at reducing the role of the state, promoting market forces, and emphasizing individual initiative. To combat inflation, Thatcher implemented monetarism and strict budgetary control in line with the arguments of the Walter Lipmann Colloque and MPS. She also restructured labor relations by curtailing the influence of labor unions.

According to David Harvey, Margaret Thatcher's policies reduced union power in the UK by opening up the country to foreign competition and investment. This influx of foreign competition led to the decline of traditional British industries, such as steel in Sheffield and shipbuilding in Glasgow, which virtually disappeared within a few years. As a result, a significant portion of trade union power was lost along with these industries. Additionally, in 1984, Thatcher's actions caused a strike among miners when she announced job cuts and pit closures due to cheaper imported coal, further contributing to the weakening of trade unions in the UK (Harvey 2005, 59). The decision to close the

pits was justified by arguing that it was not “economically realistic” to keep them operational. According to Mark Fisher, the miner's incident holds significant symbolic and practical importance in the development of neoliberalism. This is because it symbolically represented protests against neoliberal policies as unrealistic, while depicting the workers involved in a romanticized light. (Fisher 2009, 7-8).

This thesis previously discussed the privatization of electricity distribution in Türkiye to illustrate the practical impact of neoliberalism. Privatization of state-owned industries stands out as one of Thatcher's most prominent neoliberal policies. This initiative included the privatization of major entities such as British Airways, British Telecom, British Steel, and British Gas. For example, British Telecom, initially a state-owned telecommunications company providing services in the United Kingdom, was later privatized. This significant shift in policy set the stage for similar moves in the United States under Reagan's administration which examined in the next subchapter.

1.2.2 Neoliberal Policies of Ronald Reagan

The ending of *American Psycho* (2000) features a scene in which Ronald Reagan delivers a speech concerning the transfer of weapons to Iran to finance the Contras, a guerrilla group opposing the communist government in Nicaragua. The film portrays a narcissistic serial killer who is a young, affluent Wall Street professional. He holds himself in high regard and is disdainful of any detail that might tarnish his image. His worth is measured by the restaurants he frequents, the suits he wears, and even the facial masks he applies. In its most extreme manifestation, his value is derived from the people he kills. This depiction presents a social milieu where one's value is contingent upon their ability to consume others. The placement of this scene near the conclusion of the film holds considerable significance, especially when considering Reagan's impact on the US.

Reagan, who ironically began his career as a movie star, symbolized the neoliberal shift in the United States. He assumed office on January 20, 1981. He was the president until January 20, 1989. Some people referred to Reagan's policies as Reaganomics or Reaganism, similar to how they labeled Thatcher's policies as Thatcherism. Republican Party's Ronald Reagan's victory over Democratic Party's Jimmy Carter in the race for the White House was marked by a significantly large margin.

Additionally, the Republicans secured control of the Senate for the first time since 1952 (Mason 2022, 118).

His policies comprised of reducing the tax burden on businesses and high-income individuals; reduction in income tax rates; deregulation in sectors like telecommunications, transportation, and finance; cuts in social spending, including reductions in welfare programs and other social services; anti-union policies. However, while these policies helped to curb stagflation at the time, they also led to increased inequality, poverty, and more American Psychos.

This cinematic portrayal of neoliberalism is not only observable in the abovementioned film *American Psycho* but also in contemporary films such as *Parasite*, *Triangle of Sadness*, which are extensively analyzed in Chapter 2. However, their significance is further expounded upon in the following subchapter.

1.3. REFLECTIONS OF NEOLIBERAL CULTURE IN SOCIETY'S OUTLOOK

Neoliberalism has not only transformed governments but has also brought about significant changes in society as a consequence of its influence. This includes shifts in economic structures, social norms, and individual behaviors, reflecting a broader reorientation towards market-based values and principles.

The previous involvement of the state in social affairs has been diminished by neoliberal policies. As a result, social welfare, healthcare, education, energy and other essential services have increasingly become commodities traded within market frameworks. The aim of minimal state and the sole focus on market interest created a post-political context which resulted in commodification of everything. Now the freer than ever citizens of the sovereign state could make their dream come true by their own initiative because the invisible hand of the government (classical liberalism) was now visible and supporting their efforts to obtain more wealth by competing others. This individualistic perspective, opposed to any collectivist approach, subsequently contributed to social unrest.

We can trace the reflections of neoliberal culture in society's outlook by looking at how it shapes media representations, influences consumerism and individual identity, impacts education and social mobility policies, alters work and employment structures, affects community and social capital, influences globalization and cultural exchange, intersects with environmental attitudes, and shapes healthcare and social welfare policies. However, examining all these different aspects would be beyond the scope of this thesis.

Cinema, as one of the most prominent art forms, has always wielded significant influence in the exploration of societal understanding. In this context, analyzing cinema can be an efficient means of examining the impact of neoliberal culture, offering a focused approach compared to analyzing large datasets across multiple societal elements.

1.3.1. Cinema

Cinema and politics have always been intermingled. For instance, Siegfried Kracauer's seminal work on film theory *From Caligari to Hitler* traces the warnings of the rise of fascism in Germany. The films, namely German expressionist cinema in the 1920's reflected deeper societal anxieties and desires, which he suggests played a role in

the cultural and psychological preparation for the acceptance of Nazi ideology. For him, the films of a nation reflect its mentality in a more direct way than other artistic media for two reasons: (1) Films are never the products of an individual; (2) Films address themselves, and appeal, to the anonymous multitude. Popular films -or, to be more precise, popular screen motifs- can therefore be supposed to satisfy existing mass desires (Kracauer 2004, 5-7). Soviet propaganda films like *The Battleship Potemkin*, or declarations of French New Wave directors, are other examples of cinema's influence on society's outlook.

This thesis thus examines cinematic works as reflections of post-political dynamics in society, particularly in Chapter 2.3 and consistently throughout the entire thesis.

1.4. CHALLENGES AND OUTCOME OF NEOLIBERALISM

This thesis discussed the theoretical origins and intentions of the neoliberal ideal, as well as its implications, using the examples of the US and UK. This emerging global arrangement is occasionally referred to as the “Washington Consensus”. The term was coined by economist John Williamson and consists of 10 policy instruments: It includes fiscal deficits, public expenditure priorities, tax reform, interest rates, exchange rates, trade policy, foreign direct investment, privatization, deregulation, and property rights (Williamson 1990, 1993). He posited these measures as the shared framework guiding the policies of the US and UK governments, presenting them as a panacea for addressing the crises prevalent in Latin America. In essence, neoliberal policies were increasingly perceived as the prevailing consensus. Critics, on the other hand, were uncertain: was it a panacea or the disease itself?

Practical implications of neoliberalism basically consisted of 5 elements as Kean Birch and Vlad Mykhnenko summarized: “(1) privatization of state-run assets; (2) liberalization of trade in goods and capital investment; (3) monetarist focus on inflation control and supply-side dynamics; (4) deregulation of labour and product markets to reduce ‘impediments’ to business; and, (5) the marketization of society through public–private partnerships and other forms of commodification (Birch and Mykhnenko 2010, 5). Freed from the government's hand, markets could now operate as they should with these devices (privatization, liberalization, monetarism, deregulation and marketization). All of these terms are being referred to by scholars who criticize the outcomes of neoliberalism as the cause of the post-politics we see in Chapter 2.

Following its initial success in the UK and US, neoliberalism spread globally, significantly impacting world events. Its influence not only led to the end of the Cold War with the defeat of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall but also contributed to the strengthening of the European Union (EU) as elaborated in Chapter 2.2. The prescriptions of the Washington Consensus were adopted by international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, the World Trade Organization (WTO) or polities like the EU, thereby fostering the global dissemination of neoliberalism as evidenced in the examination of Türkiye's neoliberalization in chapter 2.2.2.

At one point, the prominent political theorist Francis Fukuyama, known for his adherence to neoliberal perspectives, even posited that humanity had reached the end of history (Fukuyama 1992). According to Fukuyama, there was no foreseeable replacement for neoliberalism as the dominant perspective.

Mark Fisher criticized this perspective and succinctly summarized the earlier arguments of critical thinkers like Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek, noting that "it's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism" (Fisher 2009, 2). He developed his ideas within the framework of "capitalist realism", defining it as "the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it" (Fisher 2009, 2).

Within the context of capitalist realism, even anti-capitalist sentiments are often expressed. In Hollywood films, the trope of the "evil corporation" frequently emerges as the antagonist. However, instead of challenging capitalist realism, this superficial anti-capitalism serves to reinforce and commodify the idea that there is no viable alternative to capitalism (Fisher 2009, 12).

Therefore, he refers to neoliberals as capitalist realists. Thus, the extensive examination of neoliberalism in this thesis, spanning from the 1930s to the present, elucidates its manifestation in reality, wherein it has become the dominant paradigm perceived as the only viable option without an alternative. This perspective can be interpreted as a reference to the aforementioned quote from Thatcher: "there is no alternative". Thatcher's subsequent remark in 1981 goes further by acknowledging that the aim of neoliberalism is to fundamentally change the heart and soul:

"What's irritated me about the whole direction of politics in the last 30 years is that it's always been towards the collectivist society. People have forgotten about the personal society. And they say: do I count, do I matter? To which the short answer is, yes. And therefore, it isn't that I set out on economic policies; it's that I set out really to change the approach, and changing the economics is the means of changing that approach. If you change the approach you really are after the heart and soul of the nation. Economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul." (Thatcher 1981)

Given these circumstances and within the framework of this new reality, and the transformed heart and soul, perceiving politics in its traditional sense would be misleading; the concept of post-politics is employed to characterize this novel state of affairs.

In summary, this subchapter delineates the ramifications of neoliberalism and establishes its connection with the concept of post-politics.

1.4.1. Green movements, left movements, extremists

Neoliberalism faced many challenges throughout the years, like the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, the 2007–2008 Global Financial Crisis, the victories of Brexit and Trump in 2016, etc. (Champroux et al. 2022, 28).

Neoliberal policies were implemented in Latin America in accordance with the prescriptions of the Washington Consensus and the economic theories of the Chicago School, particularly those of economist Milton Friedman. In Chile, for example, Augusto Pinochet, came into power with a coup in 1973 and subsequent economic and political reforms like the “seven modernizations” reduced the role of the state and infused competition and individualism into areas such as labor relations, pensions, health, and education (Boas and Gans-Morse 2009, 150).

Similarly, International Monetary Fund (IMF) utilized structural adjustment programs in “developing countries”, where loans, obtained through the World Bank, were contingent upon the implementation of neoliberal policies such as increased privatization, trade liberalization, foreign investment, and government deficit reduction. This trend is evident in Türkiye's rapid embrace of neoliberal policies after 2002, as explored in Chapter 2.2.2.

As a result of this wide-range neoliberalization process, even center-left parties in the US and UK adjusted their positions to align with neoliberalism, as evidenced by Bill Clinton's “market globalism” and Tony Blair's “Third Way”. Influential leaders while not officially adopting the neoliberal label or agenda, implemented neoliberal policies aimed at deregulating national economies, liberalizing international trade, privatizing state-owned enterprises, reducing government intervention, cutting taxes, and promoting globalization (Champroux et al. 2022, 32).

Additionally, security became an even more significant objective for states. Reduced government control over economic and social policies is accompanied by an increased and expanded role of the state in surveillance and control.

In essence, there was not a strong opposition from the left movements or green movements to overcome the influence of neoliberalism. On the contrary, even green politics has become commodified through advertising and marketing (Fisher 2009, 18). Major corporations have set goals to reduce their carbon footprint while maintaining their activities, a phenomenon exemplified in the films analyzed in this thesis. Amidst the continued use of resources like private airplanes by large corporations, which significantly contribute to environmental damage, there is an expectation that individual citizens should take precautionary measures against climate change. This expectation arises from the individualization of neoliberalism, where the responsibility for addressing broader issues like climate change is increasingly placed on individuals. This portrayal suggests that governments have overlooked addressing climate change.

Neoliberal forms of governmentality have gained global ascendancy, reducing politics to a matter of efficacy, with the state functioning akin to a business in a market seeking profit, thereby shifting focus from traditional ideals such as democracy and public equality to the pursuit of individual private interests. In a Thatcherist perspective, neoliberal policies might have effectively redefined “the heart and the soul”. This shift aligns with the perspective of what this thesis defines as post-politics.

As it erodes traditional political dynamics, neoliberalism has also contributed to the rise of extremist movements, including far-right extremism. In a post-political context characterized by the absence of traditional left-right political discourse, the rational basis for political debates diminishes, leading to the proliferation of extremist ideologies like white supremacy, religious radicalism, aggressive nationalism, and Islamophobia (Breger 2020, 2). The detrimental societal impact of neoliberal instruments engenders a sense of malaise within society, characterized by phenomena such as inequality, which in turn may provoke extremist reactions against green movements or leftist ideologies. This societal unrest leads us to the next subchapter.

1.4.2. Inequality in wealth distribution, privatization, financialization, austerity

The neoliberal transition worldwide has led to the dominance of technocracy at the expense of democracy. In other words, as Wendy Brown summarizes, “neoliberalism replaced the democratic terms of law, participation, and justice with idioms of benchmarks, objectives, and buy-ins that governance dismantles democratic life while appearing only to instill it with ‘best practices.’” (Shenk and Brown 2017). This “scientific” perspective on macroeconomy, and public policies, created a good result on paper for neoliberals. Neoliberalism has led to increased competition and the accumulation of wealth in formerly state-controlled sectors such as education, health, and energy. This shift has also facilitated capital inflows and contributed to higher growth rates, which are seen as indicators of an efficient governance model from a neoliberal perspective. Nevertheless, the practical outcome observed in the public sphere did not mirror the theoretical promise.

Neoliberal strategies, such as the privatization of state assets and enterprises, financialization of the economy (in which goods-producing industries began seeking profits through financial services like insurance and credit), and implementation of austerity measures, have been extensively employed by both national governments and supranational entities like the EU. However, when we examine indicators like the Gini index, which measures inequality within a country, we observe a clear trend of growing inequality. (A Gini coefficient of 0 represents perfect equality, where all income or wealth values are identical, while a Gini coefficient of 1 (or 100%) represents maximum inequality among values). In 1980, the Gini coefficient in the US was 34.72; by 2019, it had risen to 41.54. This illustrates the increasing wealth inequality that occurred following Reagan's assumption of power. Similarly, in the UK, the Gini coefficient was 27.43 in 1979, corresponding to the onset of Thatcherism, and it peaked at 38.85 in 2000. As of 2020, it stood at 32.65. These figures indicate an increase in income inequality since the implementation of neoliberal programme.

This social unrest is later examined through an analysis of contemporary acclaimed films, such the portrayal of the privatized social welfare system in the UK in *I, Daniel Blake*. Inequality's stark contrasts are also depicted in films such as *Parasite*'s comparison of lifestyles between the poor and rich in South Korea, as well as the satirical portrayal of the super-rich in *Triangle of Sadness*.

CHAPTER 2. POST-POLITICS

“Post-politics” is a concept that falls within the broader framework of postmodernism. Postmodernism is characterized by its critique of modernism. It is not inaccurate to draw connections between modernist thought and classical liberalism which is addressed in Chapter 1 in relation with neoliberalism.

Modernism, stemming from the Enlightenment, is defined by its reliance on grand meta-narratives, which are overarching, all-encompassing narratives that seek to explain the world and human existence in a linear and teleological manner. It is generally perceived as positivist, and rationalist with the belief in absolute truths, the rational planning of ideal social orders, and the standardization of knowledge and production (Harvey 1991, 9).

Teleology refers to the philosophical concept of purpose or end goal, suggesting that history and human progress follow a predetermined path toward a specific end or goal. In the context of modernism, this teleological perspective is often associated with the idea of progress, where history is seen as moving in a linear direction toward a more advanced and perfected state of society. This phenomenon is observable within the paradigms of Marxism and classical liberalism.

The modernist approach of Adam Smith in “The Wealth of Nations” aimed to establish the most optimal economic system, which, according to Smith, could only be realized through the laissez-faire principles of classical liberalism. In contrast, Marx espouses a dialectical approach and contends that the attainment of the optimal economic system is contingent upon class struggle.

Postmodernism, on the other hand, rejects this linear and teleological view of history in favor of a more fragmented and pluralistic understanding. Instead of seeking overarching explanations or universal truths, postmodernism emphasizes the diversity of human experience and the contingent nature of knowledge.

In this view, there is no single narrative or grand narrative that can capture the complexity of human existence, and instead, there are multiple perspectives that are shaped by various social, cultural, and historical contexts. In academia, for instance, the growing prominence of cultural studies over political economy exemplifies the influence of postmodernism (Žižek 2000, 3).

Frederic Jameson, an acclaimed philosopher, defines postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism, a term he borrows from Ernest Mandel. He emphasizes the fundamental change in global economic structure that occurred from the 1960s onwards. During this period, the economic model can be characterized as the era of multinational corporations within the context of globalization. In this era, the influence of the nation-state diminishes as capitalism spreads worldwide through investment instruments such as stock markets, leading to the global proliferation of capital. Parallel to these economic and technological advancements, innovations like the internet and nuclear power have come to the forefront (Jameson 1991).

The manifestation of “late capitalism” in arts, aesthetics, architecture, urban planning, and other cultural domains is characterized by waning of historicity, waning of affect, fragmentation, depthlessness and pastiche, reflecting its integration into commodity production. As Jameson suggests, the relentless economic imperative to generate increasingly novel products, ranging from clothing to airplanes, at an accelerated pace, assigns an increasingly pivotal structural role to aesthetic innovation and experimentation within the broader framework of commodity-driven economic activities (Jameson 1991, 15). Therefore, in examining the conceptual framework and the reflections of post-politics in society’s outlook, we are also studying postmodernism or the culture of late capitalism.

For instance, Jean Baudrillard's post-1980 approach is commonly regarded as representative of postmodernism. He famously argues that postmodern era is a simulation era where “boundary between image or simulation and reality implodes, and with it the very experience and ground of 'the real' disappears” (Best and Kellner 1991, 142).

His view on politics is described as “beyond all political determinations and positions”, a concept he terms as “transpolitical”. Steven Best and Douglas Kellner quote him as follows: “we suddenly become transpoliticals, that is to say beings politically indifferent and undifferentiated, politically androgynous and hermaphroditic, having digested and rejected the most contradictory ideologies and knowing only how to wear the mask. We even have become, without realizing it, perhaps, political drag queens.” (Best and Kellner 1991, 142). When considering this definition in relation to the emergence of postmodernism and the ascent of neoliberalism, it becomes apparent that this postmodern perspective can be defined as post-political.

The definition of what is commonly understood as postmodernism often aligns with the ascendancy of neoliberalism, a topic thoroughly examined in Chapter 1. Neoliberal political culture embodies postmodern attributes such as its critique of modernist classical liberalism, the decentralization of power structures, the dissolution of traditional boundaries between public and private spheres, and the proliferation of diverse cultural narratives. Additionally, neoliberalism's reliance on technological advancements and its facilitation of transnational flows of information and capital further reflect its alignment with postmodern tendencies.

The concept of post-politics, therefore, lies within this postmodern framework. Therefore, I posit that post-politics represents the contemporary condition arising from neoliberalism and its socio-political implications. In other words, authors often signify the concept of post-politics through alternative terminologies and explanations, such as “transpolitics”, “economization”, “post-democracy” and “capitalist realism”, even when the explicit term “post-politics” is not employed.

This chapter primarily engages with the ideas of Wendy Brown, David Harvey, Chantal Mouffe, and Slavoj Žižek, while also incorporating insights from other prominent thinkers. It subsequently expands on the concept of post-politics by providing additional examples through an examination of the European Union (EU) and an analysis of post-political dynamics in the context of Türkiye. Building upon this theoretical and empirical foundation, the chapter investigates the manifestations of neoliberal culture in societal attitudes. This is achieved through an exploration of its influence on contemporary cinematic representations by acclaimed directors of our time.

2.1. WHAT IS POST-POLITICS?

The highly acclaimed television series *Succession* (2018-2023) features a media mogul (Logan Roy) who owns a vast, influential corporation and uses the following words: “What are people? They’re economic units. I’m 100 feet tall; these people are pygmies. But together they form a market. What is a person? It has values and aims, but it operates in a market. marriage market... job market, money market, market for ideas et cetera, et cetera.”. This line serves as a noteworthy example for comprehending the concept of post-politics, which entails the transformation of politics into a market-oriented endeavor.

Post-politics defined as the current rationality of replacing politics with economics and envisions a society wherein conflict and antagonism are supplanted by economic evaluation and measurement (Taşkale 2016, 2). In this post-political world, businesspeople like Logan Roy, who own major businesses, exert control over the public (market) to maintain its stability and forestall potential collective political challenges.

Throughout *Succession*, the series illustrates the influential role of business in shaping government leadership and decision-making processes. As a recently established television series, acknowledged by both critics and audiences, I regard it as a significant illustration of post-politics.

Thus, post-politics represents the contemporary manifestation of neoliberalism, wherein political operations are geared solely towards fostering neoliberal market interests. Ali Rıza Taşkale highlights one of the most salient features of post-politics as its suppression of conflict, antagonism, and social change (Taşkale 2016).

Neoliberal governments defined any action that was detrimental to market interests as demeaning, thereby leaving no space for other perspectives and as Mark Fisher articulated “Over the past thirty years, capitalist realism has successfully installed a 'business ontology' in which it is simply obvious that everything in society, including healthcare and education, should be run as a business” (Fisher 2009, 17). To comprehend the concept of post-politics, we must critically analyze and address the widespread establishment of this business ontology. Thus, the space where we anticipate politics to reside, characterized by democratic contestation between opposing ideas, is increasingly dominated by consensual techno-managerial negotiations.

The delineation of this “techno-managerial” outlook on politics is exemplified by the subsequent definition by Japhy Wilson and Erik Swyngedouw in their seminal work:

“In post-politics, political contradictions are reduced to policy problems to be managed by experts and legitimated through participatory processes in which the scope of possible outcomes is narrowly defined in advance. ‘The people’ – as a potentially disruptive political collective – is replaced by the population – the aggregated object of opinion polls, surveillance, and bio-political optimisation. Citizens become consumers, and elections are framed as just another ‘choice’, in which individuals privately select their preferred managers of the conditions of economic necessity.” (Wilson and Swyngedouw 2014, 16)

Therefore, in a post-political context, any alternative that does not align with techno-managerial calculations appears unrealistic, as I discussed Mark Fisher’s concept of capitalist realism in Chapter 1.4. While Taşkale defines post-politics as a hindrance to social change, Fisher’s explanation serves as a pertinent illustration of this concept: “poverty, famine and war can be presented as an inevitable part of reality, while the hope that these forms of suffering could be eliminated easily painted as naive utopianism.” (Fisher 2009, 22).

In a state of post-politics, change is confined to the parameters set by neoliberal prescriptions. Under such circumstances, the most a citizen can do is participate in elections, which largely involve a competition between centrist political parties. This aligns with Chantal Mouffe’s argument regarding the absence of a genuine political struggle between various political projects and the prevalence of a consensus in the center, which she suggests can pave the way for extremist movements (See Chapter 2.1.2).

Numerous scholars, philosophers, and researchers have examined this postmodern understanding of the neoliberal world through various lenses. For example, political scholars such as Chantal Mouffe have focused on the adversarial spectrum generated by post-politics, while academics like Wendy Brown have underscored the pervasive influence of post-politics in permeating all aspects of life. This subchapter critically examines the literature that encompasses what this thesis defines as post-politics.

Chapter 1 explores the impact of neoliberal economic programs, tracing their origins and evolution through key events such as the Colloque Walter Lippmann and Mont Pèlerin conferences, attended by influential figures like Hayek and Friedman, which laid the groundwork for neoliberal thought. Transitioning from this historical context, this chapter focuses on critical thinkers who analyze the implications of these programs in depth. The selection of authors—Wendy Brown, David Harvey, Chantal Mouffe, and Slavoj Žižek—is based on their seminal works that critically examine neoliberalism's effects on political structures and societal norms. Wendy Brown, for example, illuminates the transformation of the state under neoliberalism, revealing its impacts on individual subjectivity and democratic institutions. David Harvey's comprehensive critique of neoliberal capitalism emphasizes its role in widening social inequalities. Chantal Mouffe advocates for a more agonistic political approach, challenging the consensus-driven nature of post-political societies. Slavoj Žižek's analyses offer valuable insights into the depoliticizing effects of neoliberal ideology. By integrating these diverse perspectives, this chapter constructs a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding the intricate relationship between neoliberalism and post-politics.

2.1.1 Concepts by Wendy Brown, David Harvey

Wendy Brown, a prominent critical political theorist, engages in a rigorous examination of the detrimental impacts of neoliberalism in her literature. Following quote from *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*, reveals the post-political condition:

“In neoliberal reason and in domains governed by it, we are only and everywhere homo oeconomicus, which itself has a historically specific form. Far from Adam Smith’s creature propelled by the natural urge to “truck, barter, and exchange,” today’s homo oeconomicus is an intensely constructed and governed bit of human capital tasked with improving and leveraging its competitive positioning and with enhancing its (monetary and nonmonetary) portfolio value across all of its endeavors and venues. These are also the mandates, and hence the orientations, contouring the projects of neoliberalized states, large corporations, small businesses, nonprofits, schools, consultancies, museums, countries, scholars, performers, public agencies, students, websites, athletes,

sports teams, graduate programs, health providers, banks, and global legal and financial institutions.” (Brown 2015, 10)

In this passage, Wendy Brown highlights the pervasive influence of neoliberalism across all spheres of politics. As the domain of the state diminishes, the domains governed by neoliberalism expand, resulting in the treatment of people as economic units rather than as citizens. How? in Chapter 1, we provided an overview of the principles underpinning neoliberalism, including those encapsulated in the Washington Consensus.

The summary of neoliberal rules encompassed five key principles: privatization, liberalization, monetization, deregulation, and marketization. According to Brown, a reliance on these neoliberal principles has compromised certain foundational elements that are intrinsic to a system where the authority and legitimacy of the government are derived from the consent and participation of the governed. These encompass what is commonly understood as democratic values in contemporary thinking, such as “the practices and principles of speech, deliberation, law, popular sovereignty, participation, education, public goods, and shared power” (Brown 2015, 10). Brown argues that these values are submitted to what she calls economization. Therefore, for instance, when the European Union (EU) grapples with a democratic deficit or a legitimacy debate, it becomes imperative to consider the aspect of economization as well (Refer to Chapter 2.2.1 for an in-depth examination of the democratic deficit in the EU).

While economization emphasizes rights, civil liberties, elections, and individual freedom, as well as the state's role in providing order and security, it undermines the fundamental nature of democracy (Brown 2015, 10-11). Therefore, economization, or post-politics, permeates all aspects of existence, from democratic institutions to individual subjectivity.

Another author whose concepts are utilized in this thesis, David Harvey argues that neoliberalization is most accurately understood as a political project aimed at re-establishing the conditions for capital accumulation and restoring, or in some cases (as in Russia and China), creating the power of an economic elite (Harvey 2006, 19). He emphasizes economic inequalities as I discussed in Chapter 1.4 by examining Gini indices. He focuses on data like the share of national income of the top 1 per cent of income earners or the ratio of the median compensation of workers to the salaries of CEOs (Harvey 2006, 19). It demonstrates a persistent trend of increasing inequality in

favor of business, a phenomenon that continues to hold true in the present day (See Chapter 1.4).

Contemporary films that garner substantial attention, such as *Parasite* or *Triangle of Sadness*, aggressively underscore this inequality engendered by neoliberalism. These two films, along with other important films analyzed in Chapter 2.3.1, provide significant insights into the societal dynamics shaped by post-politics. Despite the pervasive influence of such pronounced inequality in films and various aspects of society, how does neoliberalism persist?

David Harvey, building on Antonio Gramsci's framework, highlights how neoliberalism becomes ingrained in common sense, effectively becoming unquestioned and accepted as the norm. This neoliberal common sense conceals the origins of political and economic issues by promoting culturalist and nationalist narratives that focus on race, gender, sexuality, religion, the family, freedom, corruption, and law and order (Camp 2020). In reality, a class struggle has persisted, although only one side, namely the wealthy, has been actively engaged.

David Harvey discusses how new patterns of niche consumerism and individualized lifestyles emerged, characterized by a postmodern urbanization style. This urbanization included the transformation of city centers into themed, sanitized spaces reminiscent of Disney, alongside the process of gentrification. He criticized individualization and emphasized the state's response to COVID-19, which focused on personal isolation rather than a collective societal solution (Harvey 2020).

Harvey also observes the rise of social movements focused on a blend of self-centered individualism, identity politics, multiculturalism, and sexual orientation (Harvey 2010, 131). Moreover, he argues that these postmodern instruments of neoliberalism exploit and manipulate traditional class solidarities. The rise of technological developments has further intensified possessive individualism, leading to a widespread acceptance of personal responsibility as a cultural norm across social classes. This creates a post-political spectrum, thereby shifting away from the traditional left-right dichotomy and concealing the real political struggle.

The transition toward postmodern spectrums is notably accentuated in Slavoj Žižek's works, while Chantal Mouffe's discussion of the elimination of the antagonistic nature of politics serves as a segue to the subsequent subchapter.

2.1.2 Concepts by Chantal Mouffe, Slavoj Žižek

In her analysis, Chantal Mouffe contends that the narrative of neoliberalism, which was extensively scrutinized in Chapter 1, has engendered an ideological bias that precludes the existence of authentic politics. For Mouffe, this bias is evident in the portrayal of the United States as a benevolent leader, working with global institutions like the IMF and the WTO to unify the world and establish a just global order (Mouffe 2005, 91).

This assumption also serves as a justification for Türkiye's neoliberalization, as discussed in Chapter 2.2.2. Türkiye implemented the IMF's prescriptions in order to navigate through economic crisis.

However, the advancement of this capitalist vision is challenged by nation-states clinging to traditional concepts of sovereignty. Despite these challenges, proponents of globalization anticipate that ongoing global developments will eventually overcome these obstacles (Mouffe 2005, 91).

This trajectory, which is visible in the European Union's (EU) neoliberalization, wherein states agreed to give sovereignties in favor of the market especially with the boost of the UK and the US, is a topic thoroughly examined in Chapter 2.2.

Chantal Mouffe, a renowned political theorist, contends that politics inherently involves conflict and critiques the consensus-based view of democracy which suggests that we have reached the "end of history" (see Chapter 1.4). She underscores the antagonistic nature of "the political" and criticizes the view that politics should be understood beyond the traditional left-right spectrum. She explicitly uses the word "post-politics" to define the process which blurs the political frontier between the right and the left as a consequence of financial capitalism and the limits they imposed to state interventions and their redistributive policies.

She argues that post-politics only permits a rotation of power between center-right and center-left parties. Those who challenge the "consensus in the center" and the belief that there is no alternative to neoliberal globalization are labeled as "extremists" or dismissed as "populists" (Mouffe 2018).

Chantal Mouffe aims to illustrate that recognizing the inherent conflict in social life is not detrimental but rather essential for understanding the challenges that

democratic politics face. In the context of post-politics, the sphere of politics is suppressed, a point she elucidates as follows:

“What is happening is that nowadays the political is played out in the moral register. In other words, it still consists of a we/they discrimination, but the we/they, instead of being defined with political categories, is now established in moral terms. In place of a struggle between 'right and left,' we are faced with a struggle between 'right and wrong.’” (Mouffe 2005, 5)

She argues that to overcome the binary notion of good versus bad and the resulting adversarial antagonism, it is necessary to establish an “agonistic” public sphere. This sphere allows for the contestation of various hegemonic political projects. However, post-politics promotes “the ‘consensus at the centre’ between centre-right and centre-left, the so-called ‘radical centre’ promoted a technocratic form of politics according to which politics was not a partisan confrontation but the neutral management of public affairs” (Mouffe 2018). The adoption of a technocratic approach to politics and the neutral management of public affairs embodies the essence of post-politics. She summarizes the post-political nature of neoliberalization, which was examined in Chapter 1, as follows:

“Neoliberal globalization was seen as a fate that we had to accept, and political questions were reduced to mere technical issues to be dealt with by experts. No space was left for the citizens to have a real choice between different political projects and their role was limited to approving the ‘rational’ policies elaborated by those experts.” (Mouffe 2018, 10)

The historical trajectory of this “fate” is explored in the subsequent subchapter, which delves into both the European Union's (EU) and Türkiye's experiences with neoliberalism.

Another scholar who explicitly employed the term “post-politics” like Mouffe is Slavoj Žižek. Žižek is a prominent figure in philosophy, having authored numerous books and contributed significantly to the discourse on post-politics. His definition of post-politics is as follows:

“In post-politics, the conflict of global ideological visions embodied in different parties competing for power is replaced by the collaboration of enlightened technocrats (economists, public opinion specialists...) and liberal multiculturalists. Through the negotiation of interests, a compromise is reached in the guise of a more or less universal

consensus. Post-politics emphasizes the need to leave old ideological divisions behind and confront new issues armed with the necessary expert knowledge and free deliberation that takes people's concrete needs and demands into account." (Žižek 2000, 198)

In this passage, he emphasizes the post-political presumption of the technocratic structure's superiority. He argues that neoliberalism's assumption about the profitability of markets leads to the exclusion of any idea that is not profitable. Similar to Mouffe, he posits that this exclusion precludes any alternative, specifically "the political", which Žižek defines as "the space of litigation in which the excluded can protest the wrong/injustice done to them" (Žižek 2000, 199).

This process of the transformation of the democratic political struggle into the post-political procedure of negotiation and multiculturalist policing results in extremist movements like postmodern racism. So, post-politics causes violent outbursts which he exemplify as follows: "The ethnic violence perpetrated by neo-Nazi skinheads is not the 'return of the repressed' of liberal multiculturalist tolerance, but rather directly generated by it, revealing its concealed true face." (Žižek 2000, 199). Slavoj Žižek's perspective holds that, from a Lacanian standpoint, post-politics not merely repress, as argued by Mouffe, but "forecloses" the political.

In the contemporary post-political landscape, marked by what is often referred to as the "end of ideology", there is a noticeable trend toward depoliticization in the economic sphere. This depoliticization involves the acceptance of economic processes, such as the implementation of policies like cutting social welfare, as natural and beyond the realm of political debate. Consequently, discussions around civic engagement and public discourse tend to focus more on cultural issues, such as those related to religion, sexuality, and ethnicity (Žižek 2000, 353)

In essence, if the issue with today's post-politics, what Žižek refers to as the "administration of social affairs", is its growing hindrance of genuine political action, then this hindrance stems directly from the depoliticization of economics. It arises from the widespread acceptance of Capital and market mechanisms as neutral tools/procedures to be exploited (Žižek 2000, 353).

Again, depoliticizing economics, known as post-politics, paves the way for other postmodern forms of politicization: there is a lot of discussion about new kinds of politics

emerging, often focused on specific issues such as gay rights, ecology, and ethnic minorities (Žižek 2000, 354).

In the context of this theoretical framework, the upcoming subchapters will analyze the post-politics in European Union and Türkiye while also examining the post-political characteristics of contemporary cinematic works directed by acclaimed directors of our time.

2.2. RISE OF POST-POLITICS

Wendy Brown summarizes Neoliberalism as “a bundle of policies privatizing public ownership and services, radically reducing the social state, leashing labor, deregulating capital, and producing a tax- and- tariff friendly climate to direct foreign investors.” (Brown 2019, 18). She stresses the argument that “it was both intellectually conceived and practically unveiled as a global project in which nation-state economic sovereignty would be superseded by the rules and agreements set by supranational institutions” (Brown 2019, 18). One of the supranational organizations in question was the European Union (EU) and the traditional notion of nation-state sovereignty, historically significant in the field of international relations, has cast a shadow over the integration history of the EU for many years.

In the early stages of neoliberalism's development, as explored in Chapter 1, the ideology remained on the periphery despite significant financial support. During the postwar period, there was a near-unanimous adherence to the Keynesian economy, with widespread application of its prescriptions. The attainment of full employment and poverty alleviation were commonly pursued objectives in the United States and a significant part of Western Europe, characterized by high top tax rates and governments' unapologetic pursuit of social objectives.

This pursuit resulted in the development of new public services and safety nets. Concurrently, the EU has implemented these policies in accordance with its objectives, such as creating a community characterized by a single market with free trade. A historical review below provides a deeper understanding of these developments.

The European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) was founded in 1951 with the primary aims of curbing competition in the coal and steel sectors and overseeing Germany's capacity to produce armaments, among other objectives, through the establishment of a supranational authority. Jean Monnet, the architect of this initiative, had experienced the devastation of wars and believed that economic integration could help to prevent conflicts. He foresaw that the resurgence of demand for coal and steel could potentially lead to catastrophic consequences, thus emphasizing the need for a cooperative framework to manage these vital industries. This initial perspective shares similarities with the views of Friedrich Hayek, who developed his ideas based on his

personal experiences during wartime. In this context, it would not be inaccurate to suggest that both the origins of the EU and neoliberalism were aimed at preventing wars.

Following the establishment of the ECSC, the European Economic Community (EEC) was founded in 1957. At that time, the world was divided into two blocs: the East, under the influence of the Soviets, and the West, under the influence of the US.

The unification of European states was strategically advantageous for the containment policies of the US, which aimed to counter Soviet influence. Consequently, the powers within the Western bloc coalesced, and the EEC aligned itself with the path pursued by the US. Türkiye was also part of this bloc and aligned its domestic and foreign policies with those of the US, a topic evaluated in Chapter 2.2.2.

The aim of the EEC was to establish a single market, a goal that was not realized until thirty-three years later, coinciding with the ascendancy of neoliberalism.

During the Golden Age, as referenced in Chapter 1.1, capitalism facilitated the mass production of bicycles, automobiles, household goods, and various other commodities, rendering them widely accessible. This accessibility enabled people to travel to diverse locations, thereby expanding their horizons. Consequently, this emergence of a new, tranquil lifestyle represented a stark contrast to the hardships endured during the war.

The economic growth led to surpluses that enabled the expansion of the welfare state. This development allowed people to benefit from social provisions such as free education, healthcare, paid holidays, and other entitlements. European integration extended beyond institutional realms to encompass social dimensions. A dimension that subsequently becomes disregarded by neoliberal prescriptions, as summarized in Chapter 1.4.

During this period, the EEC faced challenges in implementing the single market due to the longstanding conflicts among its member states, which necessitated the relinquishment of significant sovereign rights. The establishment of a single market requires a three-stage plan.

Initially, internal barriers needed to be dismantled to create a customs-free area. Subsequently, a common customs tariff was to be introduced to address discrepancies at external borders which is compatible to the trade liberalization principle of neoliberalism,

leading to the formation of a customs union. Finally, to ensure fair competition within the market, the EEC had to agree on common legislation, essentially constituting laws.

However, these measures were not implemented, as achieving unanimity among member states for the approval of these laws proved to be a formidable hurdle, making the implementation of the single market unattainable through unanimous voting.

In essence, the requirement for unanimous consent rendered the establishment of a single market unfeasible. Nevertheless, as previously argued in Chapter 1.2, the concept of state sovereignty was on the verge of transforming into consumer sovereignty with post-politics. Only then do states agree to relinquish some of their sovereign rights in favor of the market as examined in the next subchapter.

Concurrently, Türkiye, a relatively new republic with a political culture that strongly emphasizes sovereignty, was not prepared to cede its sovereign rights in the context of neoliberal prescriptions.

Amidst these developments, as outlined in Chapter 1.2, stagflation and market saturation were evident within the community of member states, leading to a crisis that affected both sides of the Atlantic. This crisis was characterized by a dramatic rise in inflation, increased unemployment, declining corporate earnings, and a decrease in GDP.

Additionally, the period was marked by an oil price shock and the collapse of the Bretton Woods system. The Bretton Woods system, which pegged currencies to the value of the US dollar, faltered as the United States became indebted due to the Vietnam War, leading to a shortage of gold reserves backing the dollar.

The onset of neoliberal economic prescriptions in the 1980s began to impact both Türkiye and the EU. In Türkiye, the full implementation of neoliberal policies occurred under the rule of the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) starting in 2002, particularly with the establishment of the presidential system, which was solidified after the 2017 elections. Subsequent chapters delve into the phenomenon of post-politics within the contexts of the EU and Türkiye.

2.2.1 Technocratic structure of the European Union

The end of the Golden Age ushered in a period of crisis, prompting a series of initial responses. The creation of the European Council in 1974 established an official intergovernmental body at the supranational level, aimed at enabling more rapid

responses to the crises affecting the community. The initiation of European Parliament (EP) elections in 1979 represented a significant step towards enhancing legitimacy. The establishment of the European Monetary System (EMS) in 1979 played a role in stabilizing exchange rates and fostering conditions for economic recovery. Additionally, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) introduced case-law doctrines such as mutual recognition and direct effect.

Cumulatively, these initiatives signified a new stage in integration, marked by reactions to urgent challenges and a broadening of political integration. However, they also sparked additional debates about their legitimacy, particularly regarding the democratic deficit.

In a modern republic, sovereignty derives from its people, who confer consent and legitimacy upon the government in a democratic system. Nevertheless, within the EU, the democratic process faces challenges due to the predominant decision-making roles of the European Commission and the European Council. This arrangement can distance the “demos” (the people) from direct political influence. This dynamic may limit the democratic representation of diverse political preferences.

Initially, the EU's policies were more confined compared to subsequent expansions. As a result, less scrutiny was placed on the EU's legitimacy, given that its policies were mainly technical and economic in nature. These policies were implemented as technical details preceding the neoliberal agenda, as mentioned in the introduction of Chapter 2.2. Social welfare policies were being implemented in accordance with the prevailing economic system of the time. As long as these policies proved effective, concerns about legitimacy remained secondary. This phenomenon can be characterized as a permissive consensus (Hooghe and Marks 2009). As a supranational economic organization, the EU was deemed acceptable as long as its policies were effective. However, as a political entity, it was perceived as less democratic compared to traditional sovereign nation-states.

Amidst the crisis, the EU faced a pivotal decision. The emergence of neoliberalism in the US, characterized by privatization, deregulation, and liberalization, offered a potential solution. With the single market already in mind, the EU had to choose between integrating into global competitiveness through its single market or maintaining national sovereignty.

Neoliberal perspective argued that failure to integrate would result in falling behind global powers. The EU's decision to address the crisis mirrored the neoliberal model implemented by the US, involving the privatization of formerly state-owned companies and deregulation of markets, among other measures.

This new order represented a reconfiguration of the relationship between the state, economy, and society, characterized by the principles of Thatcherism and Reaganomics, as discussed in Chapter 1.2. The principles of neoliberalism enabled the elimination of three barriers (mentioned in the introduction of Chapter 2.2) to establish a unified market: internal trade impediments, the implementation of a common customs tariff, and the establishment of common legislation. This process culminated in the ratification of the Single European Act (SEA) in 1985. Subsequently, preparations commenced for the establishment of the single market by 1992. The community even established its own central bank, the European Central Bank (ECB). Thus, by its very nature, neoliberalism facilitated the EU in achieving its objectives.

However, as a result of increased political integration, the permissive consensus has transformed into a constraining dissensus (Hooghe and Marks 2009). Moreover, neoliberalism has contributed to social inequalities that hinder political integration, as societal fragmentation undermines prospects for such unity. The oversight of the fact that increased integration necessitates greater politicization was justified by neoliberalism's requirement for compromises from nation-states in favor of an efficient market.

The Golden Age, characterized by a robust welfare state and comprehensive integration, ultimately transitioned into a period marked by increased political integration. Nevertheless, the erosion of the welfare state and the prioritization of market mechanisms by neoliberal policies have paved the way for a post-political environment. Consequently, the EU has faced criticism for these developments, alongside its democratic deficit, which has further contributed to the emergence of a post-political landscape.

Following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Central and Eastern European countries sought membership in the EU. The community acquired its name "EU" with the Maastricht Treaty (1992), one of several treaties signed at the time to advance the deepening and widening of the union. With the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) of 2007, the EU

acquired a form of “constitution” that remains in force today. CJEU is acting akin to a constitutional court in this context.

The EU has been regarded as an aspirational goal for numerous states. However, this enlargement and expansion has resulted in increased diversity, making the task of defining a common European identity even more challenging and exacerbating the visibility of the democratic deficit. This meant some kind of a politicization and some pro-EU scholars criticize politicization because it leads to “constraining dissensus”, and they argue that increased politicization of the EU would result in greater deadlock. Therefore, debates regarding democracy within the EU thrived.

This historical analysis of the EU's neoliberalization serves as a valuable framework for understanding its post-political character since its establishment. Initially, the EU functioned primarily as a “technical” organization, but over time, it gradually expanded into the social sphere. Through the implementation of neoliberal mechanisms, it merged its technical insulation with increased political influence, thereby confining politics to the realm of technocracy. It's also visible in its institutional structure.

In the context of a post-political framework, the structure of the EU exemplifies the dominance of neutral expert administration and an undemocratic rationality in governing the entire political process. (Taşkale 2018, 40). To understand this undemocratic rationality, we can examine the democratic deficit of the EU. Simon Hix and Andreas Follesdal summarizes it in five elements (Hix and Follesdal 2006):

The first element concerns the insufficient national parliamentary oversight of the EU's executive bodies. Ministers in the Council and government appointees in the Commission operate beyond the reach of the national parliaments of member states. This arrangement effectively concentrates power within the executive branch.

Secondly, the European Parliament (EP) is considered to be insufficiently empowered. For instance, the EP lacks the authority to determine the level of public budgetary income, particularly regarding tax increases, a traditional prerogative of parliamentary bodies.

Thirdly, the absence of “European” elections is notable. This means that the EP elections are perceived by EU citizens as a precursor to national elections, “second order elections”. This dynamic underscore the absence of a cohesive European “demos”. How can there be a functioning EU democracy without a unified demos?

Therefore, this aspect can be reformulated to underscore the need for a platform for public discourse or the establishment of an “agonistic” public sphere, as suggested by Mouffe, to overcome the post-political condition. In essence, this aspect highlights the dearth of social cohesion among European citizens. Given that post-politics is sustained by the absence of social cohesion, it is particularly conducive to advancing market interests.

Fourthly, there exists a psychological and institutional gap between the electorate and the EU. Psychologically, individuals are generally unfamiliar with EU governance, as their primary engagement lies in domestic policies. Consequently, their political knowledge is typically confined to national and local politics, leading to a perception of the EU as “too distant” from the populace. Institutionally, Hix and Follesdal emphasize the lack of electoral oversight over the Council or the Commission. The Spitzenkandidaten procedure, which they primarily advocated, serves as a notable example for enhancing legitimacy. Under this procedure, the candidate from the largest EP group assumes the presidency of the Commission. Despite the presence of the lead candidates' campaign for the European Commission Presidency, it is deemed insufficient. This highlights the influence of the Council and the Commission over the public, reflecting a reduction in public influence and the effectiveness of technocratic choices in a post-political context.

Lastly, as a consequence of these factors, policies are not shaped in accordance with the interests of voters; instead, they are devised without significant input from the public.

In this context, interest groups and major corporations hold sway over policy outcomes, while groups with more diffuse interests find it challenging to participate in the policy-making process. Consequently, national partisan politics has been marginalized (Schmidt 2006, 2). This illustrates the post-political foreclosure of “the political” by depoliticizing economics, as examined in chapter 2.1.2 in Žižekian terms.

While the EU is characterized by “policy without politics”, as Vivien Schmidt argues, due to the marginalization of national partisan politics, its member states experience “politics without policy” (Schmidt 2006, 2).

This situation aligns with the condition of post-politics, where decision-making is perceived as being removed from the democratic sphere and concentrated in

technocratic or bureaucratic institutions. As an increasing number of policies are shifted away from the national political arena, citizens in member states find themselves with limited direct influence over EU-related policies that impact them, often having only national politicians to hold accountable. This dynamic has contributed to the issues of voter disaffection and political extremism that currently afflict democracies within EU member states.

This phenomenon was evident in the EU's response to specific neoliberal crises. The "troika" refers to a decision-making group composed of the European Commission, the European Central Bank (ECB), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The troika's approach was criticized as embodying a post-political stance (Taşkale 2018, 40). Because it's diminishing the role of elected representatives and the democratic process in shaping economic policies. This approach limits public participation and accountability, leading to decisions that were detached from the broader social and political context. For example, the changes precipitated by the crisis reached a climax with the 2015 election of Alexis Tsipras's Syriza, heralded as a symbol of hope for Europe's radical left in Greece. However, despite substantial public resistance, the interventions of the Troika compelled the Greek government to implement even more rigorous measures of austerity, privatization, and neoliberal reforms. Ultimately, these policies led to the electoral defeat of Syriza in Greece.

Wendy Brown contends that the original proponents of neoliberalism, such as Friedrich Hayek or Milton Friedman, did not envision the current neoliberal configuration (See Chapter 1.1). She likens the trajectory of neoliberalism to that of Marxism, asserting that the Marxist theoretical framework did not align with the actual practices of repressive communist states. Similarly, Brown argues that neoliberalism was not initially conceived as the model that is observed today. Instead, it emerged as a reaction against totalitarianism or fascism (Brown 2019, 9).

This trajectory is evident in the previously mentioned historical decisions of the EU. Initially conceived as a project aimed at fostering peace and ending wars in the region, the EU, with its limited competencies, faced relatively little debate. However, with the implementation of neoliberal policies and the expansion of its influence, it has evolved into another post-political entity that, as Wendy Brown suggests, economizes everything under the façade of a technocratic neutral entity.

Consequently, this reduction of politics relegates decision-making to technocrats who prioritize market interests under the guise of serving the public good. Simultaneously, the EU presents its democratic institutions as nurturing the rights of minorities and the LGBTQ+ community. However, as Mouffe argues, those who challenge this “consensus in the center” are labeled as “extremists” or dismissed as “populists” because this is a technocratic form of politics in which politics is not seen as a clash of ideologies but rather as the neutral administration of public affairs.

Similar to the influence of the US on the EU through its neoliberal agenda, the EU exerted significant influence on Türkiye's neoliberalization. The subsequent subchapter will explore the post-political dynamics within Türkiye's presidential system while also examining the impact of the EU on this framework.

2.2.2 Other examples: Türkiye's presidential system

Türkiye adopted a neoliberal approach and embraced its principles after the 1980 coup. The junta led by General Kenan Evren was committed to depoliticizing society (Ahmad 2004, 150). This recalls the process of neoliberalization observed in Latin American countries under the influence of the US (See Chapter 1.4.1).

Türkiye's neoliberal trajectory gained momentum with the political initiatives of prime minister Turgut Özal in the 1980s. The EU emerged as a pivotal institution in fostering "interdependency," thereby becoming an increasingly significant objective for Türkiye.

This significance was further underscored when Türkiye joined the EU's Customs Union in December 1995. Subsequently, at the Helsinki European Council meeting in December 1999, the EU announced Türkiye's candidacy for membership. The process has not progressed and appears unlikely in the foreseeable future.

The Turkish capitalist class integrated into the international economy through the process of internationalization and liberalization. This integration caused upheaval in the Turkish economy, similar to other developing countries (Aybar and Lapavitsas 2001). The global economic crisis of 2001 naturally affected Türkiye. The IMF and World Bank's structural adjustment programs, discussed in Chapter 1.4.1, guided the country's economy during this period.

Kemal Derviş, who was associated with the World Bank, developed a neoliberal framework for Türkiye to address the crisis. This framework emphasized privatization and liberalization (See Chapter 1.4). However, in practice, the implementation of these measures did not align with democratic ideals but rather involved a repressive state with authoritarian tendencies, aiming to safeguard market interests (Akça 2017, 189-210).

The privatization efforts faced opposition from political and judicial quarters, with institutions like the Constitutional Court posing significant barriers. For instance, the Court hindered electricity privatization deals, asserting that electricity, as a public service, should be provided by the state (Çetin and Oğuz 2007). Öniş highlights the Court's obstructive role in deterring privatization efforts, particularly for foreign investors (Öniş 2011). Nevertheless, the AK Party managed to navigate around these obstacles.

Preceding the AK Party, the incumbent coalition government showed reluctance in fully implementing the IMF program. Ziya Öniş cites instances of the coalition government's hesitance to privatize major state enterprises like Turk Telecom or to reform the banking and financial system in line with the IMF package. In contrast, the AK Party displayed a strong commitment to privatization, as evidenced by its more determined approach in pursuing these policies (Öniş 2009). This dedication was underscored by the AK Party government's privatization of even the National Lottery.

The AK Party assumed power in 2002 and continued with the existing economic program. Its electoral success was partly attributed to the perception that the incumbent coalition government was responsible for the crisis, which had impacted various segments of society across different socioeconomic strata (Evrensel 2002).

The AK Party adopted an anti-statist political stance and also displayed opposition to the influence of the military, rooted in the military's historical role within the “Kemalist” tradition. The party's agenda aligned with IMF guidelines and was oriented towards EU accession, a direction supported not only by influential lobbies and business associations like TUSIAD (Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen's Association) but also by significant sectors of big business. (Ahmad 2004, 176).

With the AK Party government already in office, negotiations for Türkiye's EU membership began in 2005. These negotiations also coincided with substantial inflows of foreign direct investment (FDI) and significant privatization initiatives (Öniş 2009).

Kemal Kirişçi employs the term “trading state” to illustrate the role of economic considerations in shaping foreign policy at the time. Kirişçi underscores the increasing influence of business associations such as MUSIAD (Independent Industrialists and Businessmen's Association), TUSIAD, TOBB (Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges) and others in the decision-making processes, particularly in the realm of foreign policy (Kirişçi 2009). Öniş highlights specific actors, including transnational and institutional entities such as the EU-US-IMF "triangle," as well as transnational corporations and foreign investors (Öniş 2009). This illustrates how, within the framework of post-politics, market interests and influence extend to all spheres, including international relations. States represent business interests through their foreign policy decisions.

These developments eventually culminated in the adoption of the presidential system. The so-called Turkish-style presidential system, which came into force in 2018, grants extensive powers to the president while limiting the authority of democratic institutions such as the parliament.

This concentration of power has provided the AK Party with the opportunity to proceed with the privatization of entities like the Tank and Pallet Factory. As previously noted, there were legal impediments such as those posed by the Constitutional Court. However, the current president now holds significant influence over the Court, as he appoints 12 of its 15 members, a power granted under the presidential system.

Similar to the neoliberal trajectory observed in Thatcherism and Reaganism (See Chapter 1.2), the AK Party undertook a series of privatizations that included TEKEL enterprises (a manufacturer of tobacco and alcoholic beverage products), Sumer Holding (a manufacturer of textile products), TÜPRAŞ (a major oil refining complex), Erdemir (a steel manufacturing enterprise), Türk Telekom (a telecommunications company), fertilizer industry enterprises, salt factories, sugar factories, power plants, electricity distribution networks (See Chapter 1), shares of state banks, ETI aluminum, as well as the construction, repair, and maintenance of bridges, ports, roads, airports, and railways.

From a post-political perspective, governments frequently utilize neoliberal crises as both a rationale and a chance to privatize remaining public services, weaken the social safety net, deregulate corporations, and impose regulations on citizens. This behavior

signifies a self-deprecating stance within the state, which now extends its influence into every facet of the public sector.

The implementation of the presidential system was intended to enhance the government's efficiency in decision-making and increase the presence of technocrats in ministries. In this system, the president appoints ministers independent of parliamentary or popular influence, selecting them based on their technical expertise.

These developments can be interpreted as indicative of post-politics. Wendy Brown posits that this diminishing of politics relegates decision-making to technocrats who prioritize market interests while ostensibly serving the public good.

For example, particularly following the adoption of the presidential system, the composition of the ministerial cabinet indicated that appointments were made based on sectoral affiliations. For instance, the Minister of Health was revealed to be a co-founder of a private hospital, while the National Education Minister was associated with private schools. Similarly, the Culture and Tourism Ministers were found to have ties to a tourism company. This situation exemplifies the analysis, as it illustrates the intertwining of private interests with public office, a characteristic often associated with post-politics.

Subsequent to the 2017 constitutional amendment establishing a presidential system, the president's authority has significantly expanded. The AK Party cadres have orchestrated the requisite adjustments in the judicial, legislative, and executive branches to consolidate control over economic policy. In a notable address, the president made reference to himself as an “economist” (Medyanews 2021).

This situation exemplifies Wendy Brown's concept of economization, as well as what Slavoj Žižek and Chantal Mouffe point out as the post-political transformation of politics into technical issues that require expertise (See Chapter 2.1.1).

Examined within the neoliberal framework of the US, UK, EU, and Türkiye, post-politics gained momentum over time, exerting an increasingly influential impact on societal perspectives. The subsequent subchapter analyzes specific films to underscore their reflection of society's outlook on post-politics.

2.3. REFLECTIONS OF POST-POLITICS IN SOCIETY'S OUTLOOK

The post-politics phenomenon, situated within the historical trajectory of neoliberalism in the UK, US, EU, and Türkiye, has been instrumental in shaping societal perspectives. This phenomenon has ushered in a paradigm of “business ontology”, where societal structures, including crucial domains such as healthcare and education, are expected to adhere to the principles of business management (Fisher 2009, 17). In addition, citizenship has become a tradable asset between states, with individuals now selecting partners based on the economic advantages offered by possessing a more powerful passport. The 2008 financial crisis and the subsequent great recession of 2009 revealed the vulnerabilities of the US, EU, and several other countries. Despite this, the response to the crisis was characterized by neoliberal measures like austerity, demonstrating the dominance of neoliberal ideologies in shaping policy responses. These policies have instigated social unrest, as depicted in the film *I, Daniel Blake*, in which the protagonist, Daniel, is compelled to seek employment against medical advice due to his illness. Similarly, these policies have exacerbated inequalities, as exemplified by the stark contrast between the modest basement flat of a poor family and the opulent mansion of a wealthy family in the film *Parasite*.

Moreover, the confluence of neoliberal policies, which prioritize market-driven solutions over social welfare, and the marginalization of antagonistic politics, which stifles dissenting voices, has fueled the emergence of populist movements across Europe, the United States, and Türkiye. These movements often arise as a response to perceived inequalities and the erosion of democratic values under neoliberal regimes.

Contemporary cinematic productions provide a unique vantage point to analyze the repercussions of post-politics on societal perspectives. This thesis examines select acclaimed films, including *I, Daniel Blake*, *Triangle of Sadness*, and *Parasite*, to analyze how they reflect and comment on the themes of post-politics, neoliberalism, and their influence on society's outlook. The selection of these three films, all recipients of the esteemed Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival, highlights their artistic and thematic significance, as well as their capacity to provide compelling insights into the societal implications of neoliberalism and post-politics.

2.3.1 Cinema and post-politics

The absence of a political imagination has extended to artistic works, with many celebrated directors producing films that focus on themes such as increasing social inequalities, corporate influence, and the unresponsiveness of states to the demands of their citizens.

This subchapter engages in a critical examination of three films—*Parasite*, *Triangle of Sadness*, and *I, Daniel Blake*—as case studies that vividly reflect the challenges posed by post-politics in contemporary society. Each of these films has received the prestigious Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival, underscoring their cinematic excellence and cultural significance. Despite their disparate narratives and settings, these films converge on a common theme: the examination of societal inequalities and the dehumanizing effects of neoliberalism. Through their narratives, these films offer profound insights into the complexities of modern political and social landscapes, illuminating the human cost of post-political ideologies. The impact of Cannes on global and European cultural production further underscores the significance of these films in understanding the broader cultural and political context in which they were produced.

Parasite (2019), directed by Bong Joon-ho, notably won the Best Picture Oscar, marking the first time a “foreign” film received this accolade. Also won Palme d'Or, the biggest prize in Cannes Film Festival. As an international film that addresses the inherent inequalities of neoliberalism, *Parasite's* recognition at the Academy Awards and other big events underscores its alignment with Mark Fisher's concept of “capitalist realism” (See Chapter 1.4). This concept suggests that even dissenting perspectives on neoliberalism are commodified by post-politics.

Parasite is about a poor family (the Kim family) living in a basement-level flat in Seoul. Ki-woo, the son, starts to give lessons the daughter of Park family in their spacious mansion. Ki-woo suggests his sister (Ki Jung) for the position of an art teacher and they both conceal their relationship during her interview. Both siblings secure jobs with the Park family mansion and arrange for the driver to be fired, creating a new job opening for the father Ki Taek. After that, they also manage to get the housekeeper fired and replaced by the mother (Chung-sook). Eventually, the Kims manage to become fully integrated into the Parks, relying on their financial support.

In *Parasite*, the nature of competition without ethical constraints is vividly portrayed as a mechanism where advancement for some is contingent upon the detriment of others. The film does not pass judgment on its protagonists; rather, it offers a nuanced depiction that highlights the societal divide. *Parasite* refrains from moralizing, presenting a complex exploration of the dynamics at play in a stratified, post-political society.

The interaction between the Kim and Park families in *Parasite* serves as a clear metaphor for the class antagonism within South Korean society. This portrayal suggests that these conflicts are often obscured or overlooked due to the influence of post-politics. The film effectively contrasts the precarious living conditions of the Kims' neighborhood with the safety and security provided by the wealth accumulated by the Parks.

In a review of the film in Jacobin, a magazine known for its leftist perspectives, a critic suggests that the working-class characters depicted in *Parasite* internalize the logic of late capitalism, which I examined in the introduction of Chapter 2 with reference to Jameson. This internalization leads individuals like the member of the Kims to perceive poverty as a result of their own moral shortcomings rather than as a consequence of a system founded on exploitation and persistent insecurity (Balhorn, 2019).

The following film also highlights inequalities: The Swedish director Ruben Östlund's film *Triangle of Sadness* (2022), which won the Palme d'Or, explores social hierarchies, as suggested by its title.

The majority of the film unfolds on a ship, serving as a prominent metaphor for the concept of “we're all in the same boat”. Within this ultra-luxurious setting, both the crew and passengers are depicted as playing specific roles, although these roles are ultimately contingent. On this luxury yacht, there are tech billionaires, Russian oligarchs, fashion models, influencers, and owners of a weapons manufacturing corporation, all actors with market interests in the neoliberal system. Every relationship in this environment is portrayed as transactional, despite the individuals involved convincing themselves otherwise (Ehrlich 2022).

An example of this transactional relationship is a guest's request for staff members to use the pool, highlighting an aspiration for equality. This demand reflects the influence of market dynamics, where equality is emphasized as a market-driven requirement. This scenario exemplifies another post-political characteristic, wherein significant disparities between the market and the public are disguised by seemingly trivial gestures like this.

Additionally, the film includes scenes set on an island, functioning as an experimental domain akin to the state of nature in political theory. This setting serves to invert the established neoliberal system portrayed on the ship. The film suggests that individuals marginalized in post-political contexts may not occupy the lowest rungs of the social hierarchy in the state of nature. Instead, those at the bottom on the ship are depicted as more competent on the island, where more public deliberation is possible. Here, previously marginalized individuals demonstrate their capabilities, a scenario previously thought to be inconceivable.

Similar to the way *Parasite* maintains a certain distance from its working-class protagonists (the Kims), *Triangle of Sadness* also does not align itself with the working-class characters. For instance, the yacht's toilet cleaner, Abigail, emerges as a crucial figure among the survivors due to her skills in fishing, cooking, and fire-building. On the island, we observe her exercise of power, which can be perceived as abusive and violent. This narrative distance from the working class in both films enhances their suitability for analysis within this academic study. Possibly due to her marginalization on the ship, she abused her power on the island, akin to the emergence of extremism resulting from post-politics, as examined in Chapter 1.4.1 and Chapter 3.2.

Another Palme d'Or winner is *I, Daniel Blake* (2016) directed by the leftist filmmaker Ken Loach, known for his cinematic portrayal of class struggle, akin to the way David Harvey conceptualizes it in his works. Loach's films consistently reflect a strong leftist perspective.

In the film, Daniel Blake, a carpenter is recovering from a heart attack and navigating the process of seeking financial aid from the state. In an early scene, during the opening credits, Daniel encounters a bureaucratic employee who subjects him to a series of nonsensical questions, creating obstacles rather than providing assistance. The government employee reveals that she is not a direct employee of the British government but works for an American company contracted by them. Daniel applies for Employment Support Allowance but is declared "fit for work" disqualifying him from receiving the allowance. Consequently, he is compelled to seek employment in the job market, despite needing rest.

Throughout the film, Daniel's struggle to secure his entitlements reflects the challenges the society face within the framework of the neoliberal state. The narrative

highlights the growing influence of dehumanizing forces akin to “client culture”, characterized by corporate logic that diminishes human lives to mere economic statistics or digital data points (Romney 2016). Wendy Brown's analysis emphasizes the neoliberal system's expectation that human capital should focus on improving and leveraging competitive positioning, thereby enhancing its portfolio value across all endeavors and venues (See Chapter 2.1.1). This predicament exemplifies how post-political forces shape society, reducing citizens to mere consumers.

At the Job Centre, Daniel stands up for Katie, a single mother of two children. She faces unfair treatment from the center's bureaucratic staff, who prioritize strict adherence to procedures. Daniel develops a close relationship with Katie and assists her with various matters. The film highlights a contrast between the emphasis on market competition and the solidarity demonstrated in Daniel's relationship with Katie.

Daniel demonstrates compassion and concern for the struggling Katie at the local food bank, where Katie attempts to shoplift a can of food due to her economic conditions. It underlines the inequalities in access to food resulting from the impact of post-political forces.

Due to the integration of corporate capitalist principles into state services, the only sphere for individuals to conduct their daily lives adheres to digitalized protocols designed to maximize the profitability of contracted corporations or finance. The only avenue available to people is participation in elections, where only centrist parties can compete within the framework of neoliberalism (as exemplified by Tony Blair's adoption of neoliberal policies after Thatcher, as discussed in Chapter 1.4.1). Consequently, Daniel feels compelled to ignite political activism by spray-painting “I, Daniel Blake, demand my appeal date before I starve” on the side of a government building.

While Daniel Blake is striving to obtain the compensation he rightfully deserves, while the Kims are contending with the workers in the opulent Park family mansion, and while the staff on the super yacht in *Triangle of Sadness* is presented with the chance to indulge in the pool in response to a “delicate” guest request, they are unable to envision a world beyond the constraints of post-politics.

In conclusion, the films analyzed in this chapter—*Parasite*, *Triangle of Sadness*, and *I, Daniel Blake*—offer poignant reflections of the societal challenges posed by post-politics. These narratives vividly depict the consequences of neoliberalism, portraying

the erosion of political agency and the exacerbation of social inequalities. In *Parasite*, the film illustrates how competition devoid of ethics leads to advancement for some at the expense of others. The film avoids moralization and instead offers a nuanced portrayal of a stratified, post-political society. *Triangle of Sadness* uses its luxury yacht setting as a metaphor to depict the transactional nature of relationships in a neoliberal society. Meanwhile, *I, Daniel Blake* portrays the dehumanizing effects of bureaucratic procedures, highlighting individuals' struggles against a system that degrades them to mere economic statistics.

Nevertheless, these challenges are not insurmountable. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, a number of theorists, politicians, activists, and scholars are engaged in discussions and actions aimed at revitalizing politics and restoring a sense of political imagination. By examining these ideas within a theoretical and practical framework, we can begin to envisage a path towards a more politically vibrant future, free from the constraints of post-politics.

2.4. OVERCOMING POST-POLITICS: IDEAS FROM THEORISTS

The permeation of post-politics into all spheres of society, including the state and the economy, is considered a significant issue, as illustrated in this chapter through an analysis of the EU, Türkiye, and contemporary cinema. What are the possible solutions for overcoming the obstacles in politics? How can politics be revitalized?

As explored in the preceding subchapters, the pervasive influence of post-politics presents a formidable challenge across various societal dimensions, including government, economics, and cultural expression. Despite its entrenched presence, this phenomenon has not gone unchallenged. Scholars, activists, and political figures have proposed numerous strategies and ideas to revitalize political discourse and reinvigorate democratic engagement.

One prominent approach is the advocacy for a renewed political imagination, as articulated by theorists such as Chantal Mouffe. She argues that the current post-political condition, characterized by a consensus on neoliberal principles and the marginalization of dissenting voices, can be countered by reasserting the importance of political antagonism and the clash of ideas. This perspective emphasizes the need to move beyond the technocratic governance model and reestablish politics as a site of genuine contestation and democratic deliberation. Similarly, Slavoj Žižek, Wendy Brown, and David Harvey identify post-political trends that erode democratic values, emphasizing the necessity of a revitalized political sphere where genuine debate and ideological conflict can flourish. They all underscore the importance of recognizing and confronting these trends as a crucial step towards reclaiming democratic politics.

Additionally, scholars have called for a reevaluation of neoliberal economic policies and their impact on society. Figures like David Harvey have critiqued the inequalities and social dislocation caused by neoliberalism, advocating for alternative economic models that prioritize social welfare and sustainability. By contesting the prevailing post-political climate, these voices contribute to a broader discourse aimed at reshaping economic systems to better address the needs of all citizens.

Films like *Parasite*, *Triangle of Sadness*, and *I, Daniel Blake*, which are analyzed in this Chapter, serve as powerful indictments of neoliberalism and its dehumanizing effects, prompting viewers to question the status quo and imagine new possibilities.

Through a combination of political mobilization, intellectual critique, and cultural intervention, there exists a pathway towards revitalizing politics and fostering a more democratic and inclusive society. By engaging with the ideas and strategies proposed by theorists and activists, we can begin to envision a future beyond the constraints of post-politics, where political agency is restored, and meaningful change becomes achievable.

Building upon the insights drawn in Chapter 2, the next chapter explores current situation and potential solutions within the context of this theoretical and practical framework.

CHAPTER 3. NEOLIBERALISM AND POST-POLITICS

In line with the predictions of theorists such as Chantal Mouffe, Slavoj Žižek, Wendy Brown, David Harvey and other scholars who have examined the phenomenon of post-politics, its emergence has coincided with a notable rise in right-wing nationalisms and religious fundamentalisms across the globe.

Despite the establishment of liberal consensual techno-managerial democracies in the West, such as the EU, where more than six in ten citizens (61%) are optimistic about the future of the EU, and in Türkiye, a presidential system and its neoliberal trajectory seem to have garnered support following the 2023 elections. The leader of the AK Party and the President of Türkiye secured victory once again in these elections, as he has done since 2002 (European Commission 2023). Nevertheless, there appear to be some issues. Despite these issues, the post-political condition enables the system to maintain its stability and perpetuate itself. But what are these issues? Erik Swyngedouw summarizes as follows:

“Climate change keeps galloping forward despite successive impotent attempts to stem the pouring out of greenhouse gases, proliferating terrorist attacks of a variety of kind nurture a sense of perpetual insecurity, precarious jobs and highly polarized socioeconomic structures rupture the fabric of urban life, xenophobic and other ultra-identitarian movements populate the political landscape with increasing legitimacy and self-confidence, nationalist and populist movements march triumphantly in many countries.” (Swyngedouw 2018, xviii)

These issues or consequences are evident in society's outlook of post-politics in films, as examined in the preceding chapter. Furthermore, there is currently widespread disinterest among the public towards mainstream political parties and traditional political processes, such as representative elections. Many individuals feel disillusioned, believing that participating in politics is futile as it yields no real change. Some express their dissatisfaction by aligning with extreme identity-based movements, often characterized by xenophobic attitudes. (Swyngedouw 2018, xix)

In the first chapter of this thesis, we examined the rise of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan in the US and the UK during the initial phase of neoliberalism. In the

contemporary post-political era, figures like Bernie Sanders in the US and Jeremy Corbyn in the UK have emerged as challengers to the legacy of Thatcher and Reagan. However, their ability to make substantial progress may have been hampered by the prevailing cynicism that has taken hold among individuals in the post-political environment. This cynicism, in turn, has hindered the ability of leftist politicians like Corbyn or Sanders to thrive and effect significant change.

In addition to the prevailing lack of confidence among the citizens (or consumers?), there exists a failure on the part of the left to devise new approaches, visions and common programmes for addressing the crises stemming from neoliberalism and post-politics.

An analysis of how neoliberal states have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic shows that they have employed measures that contradict typical neoliberal approaches. For instance, they have used regulations to create safety nets, such as the Next Generation EU initiative.

The Next Generation EU initiative, a temporary €800 billion recovery instrument created in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, aims to help EU member states recover from the pandemic, especially those most affected. This illustrates how even neoliberal entities can adopt measures that appear to go against their usual principles.

In essence, notwithstanding the crises it confronted, neoliberalism has proven resilient. Nevertheless, this resilience has come at an unforeseen cost, and these repercussions are steadily escalating over time.

The public's reliance on financial markets, stemming from the phenomenon of post-politics, renders them more susceptible to unexpected global events. For instance, in our analysis of Türkiye's neoliberalization in Chapter 2.2.2, we observed an increase in foreign direct investment after the market opened in 2002. However, the economy faced challenges during the 2008 crisis because by the time, its economy became more dependent on these financial investments. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to global food inflation.

When a financial market crisis occurs somewhere, its effects extend to individuals who may be seemingly disconnected from it, such as a farmer in the Black Sea region of Türkiye whose occupation involves the harvesting of hazelnuts.

The land that provides hazelnuts for this farmer's family is under threat, a situation mirrored in many rural areas worldwide. Despite this, the agricultural sector is becoming increasingly unprofitable for numerous small-scale local farmers, leading to an exodus of young people from villages to urban centers. Consequently, these villages are now predominantly inhabited by older individuals. As the costs of production rise and the value of their products decreases, small-scale farmers find themselves at a disadvantage, while large multinational corporations profit significantly from their hazelnut crops. This disparity is particularly evident when comparing hazelnut prices internationally, with products labeled as “made in Türkiye” fetching minimal returns for the farmers who cultivate them.

A similar phenomenon is depicted in the film *Alcarràs* (2022), directed by Carla Simón, who was born in Spain in 1986 and raised in a small Catalan village. In the film, she portrays her personal experiences. Analogous to the hypothetical Turkish hazelnut farmer mentioned earlier, the peach farmer family in the film grapples with the challenges posed by neoliberalism. They face the issue of supermarkets offering very low prices for their products, which leads to mass protests in the village. Furthermore, their landowner decides to renege on the ancestral promise of never taking away their land, instead opting to install profitable solar panels. Private interests are given priority over the welfare of the vulnerable village inhabitants at a post-political macro statistical level.

This vulnerability is also evident in the ongoing aftermath of the pandemic, as illustrated by the continued rise in inflation in both Türkiye and the EU. This trend is expected to persist, highlighting the enduring impact of the pandemic.

This chapter aims to elucidate the current discourse on neoliberalism and post-politics. Initially, it examines scholars' perspectives on transcending post-politics, followed by an exploration of existing solutions and the generation of novel ideas. Subsequently, it scrutinizes the presence of post-politics through diverse global examples before critically analyzing the concept itself.

3.1 WHAT ARE THE SOLUTIONS TO OVERCOME POST-POLITICS?

As discussed in the introduction of this chapter, the notion of post-politics is seen as something that should be actively challenged. The outcome of post-politics is basically the eradication of democracy in the name of democracy itself (Wilson and Swyngedouw 2014, 24). Consequently, the restoration of democracy is viewed as a crucial element in challenging post-politics (Brown 2019).

Formulating a normative program against post-politics is not within the purview of this thesis; indeed, it may exceed the realm of academia and fall squarely within the domain of politics. Nevertheless, instances of efforts to seek solutions are occasionally observable.

One recent noteworthy example is found in Chantal Mouffe's work *For a Left Populism* (2018), where she outlines a framework for a leftist political agenda aimed at challenging post-politics and revitalizing the political arena. This subchapter further examines Chantal Mouffe's work supplemented by a personal intervention inspired by the renowned animated film series *Chicken Run*.

3.1.1 Existing solutions

A very practical solution to overcome post-politics is proposed by Chantal Mouffe. As discussed in the theoretical exploration of post-politics, Mouffe argues that the elimination of the left-right antagonism has led to the emergence of an adversarial spectrum between good and bad. This situation is characteristic of a post-political condition.

To reinvigorate traditional politics, Mouffe advocates for the creation of an agonistic public sphere where diverse political projects can compete. To overcome the binary notion of good versus bad and the resulting adversarial antagonism, it is necessary to establish an “agonistic” public sphere. This sphere allows for the contestation of various hegemonic political projects. She further develops her theory with the increase of populist discourses throughout the world.

Mouffe argues that Western Europe is currently experiencing a “populist moment”. This suggests that after the 2008 crisis, there is potential for a new populist movement to challenge neoliberal hegemony. She argues that Margaret Thatcher

effectively utilized a previous populist moment to establish neoliberal dominance in the UK. According to Mouffe, the left should learn from Thatcher's neoliberal project which was examined in Chapter 1.2.1.

She argues that for democracy to thrive, there must be a balance between liberty and equality, a balance that has been undermined by neoliberal hegemony. Left-wing populists should place greater emphasis on equality. Mouffe proposes a concept called “radical democracy”, which essentially emphasizes the importance of democratic articulation in this emerging left-wing populist discourse.

She suggests maintaining the framework of constitutional pluralist liberal democracy rather than aiming for a radical departure from it. The purpose of this proposal is to construct a collective will, representing “the people”, with the aim of rebalancing the relationship between equality and liberty, which has been damaged by neoliberal hegemony. Mouffe is not railing against political liberalism. She proposes to define “the people” according to the historical context and national traditions. However, “democracy” should always exist in the possible articulations. It is aiming at responding to a variety of different demands. It is not just for traditional left voters.

Mouffe contends that the masses are drawn to populist discourse due to the escalating inequalities perpetuated by neoliberal hegemony. Consequently, there is a heightened impetus for diverse political demands to coalesce under a chain of equivalence, wherein “the people” serve as the focal point of this discursive strategy. These equivalent demands can coalesce around the banner of democracy, representing a shared objective.

I argue that this strategy was utilized by Ekrem İmamoğlu during the 2019 local elections as he vied for the mayorship of Istanbul, a city that had been under the control of the same political movement for 25 years. His election victory came as a surprise in a period when the prevailing expectation was one of continued incumbency. İmamoğlu was the candidate of the main opposition social-democratic party Republican People’s Party (CHP).

Positioned as a center-left party, its rhetoric was fundamentally opposed to neoliberalism and the primacy of private interests. For example, he aimed at mobilizing “the people” to protect the environment against the Canal Istanbul project which is for CHP is the interest of a “minority”. He consistently employed an inclusive discourse, yet

there was a clear adversary. He repeatedly emphasized the dichotomy of “us”, representing the 16 million residents, versus “a handful of people”, aligning with Mouffe's concept of the distinction between the oligarchy and the people.

His election campaign also incorporated populist rhetoric, aligning the party with the interests of the people and establishing a chain of equivalence against the prevailing neoliberal status quo. For example, İmamoğlu said: “I said I am not going to take orders from a single individual. I will take orders from 16 million people.. I said there is no place anymore for [privileged] individuals, groups, parties, societies, foundations, relatives. There is only the nation, only the nation. This is why they did not love me. This is why they did not want me.” (İmamoğlu 2019 as cited in Balta and Demiralp 2021, 17)

He labeled this strategy “radical love”, perhaps drawing on the connotations of radical democracy associated with Mouffe's approach. Hers is certainly not the only argument against post-politics. There are various alternative approaches that can be identified as counterarguments to the concept of post-politics.

While such strategies are significant, historical evidence suggests that they are often not sustainable. Electoral victories of left-leaning parties tend to be short-lived, as the implementation of neoliberal programs typically supersedes initial electoral promises and gains control in the long run.

Hence, electoral triumphs of anti-neoliberal parties do not necessarily translate into subsequent victories. For instance, Syriza's defeat by New Democracy in the recent elections, following the implementation of stringent neoliberal measures by the troika as previously discussed (see Chapter 2.2.1), exemplifies this trend.

The recurring success of neoliberal parties fosters a sense of despair, gradually eroding political imagination. However, the realm of imagination can be found in films, particularly in children's movies like *Chicken Run*, which underscores the significance of organization and faith. This observation leads us to the subsequent subchapter.

3.1.2 New ideas and predictions

In the film *Chicken Run* (2000), the chickens residing on Mrs. Tweedy's farm are subjected to daily measurements, where those deemed overweight are selected for consumption, while the others are compelled to produce eggs. Their existence is confined within the confines of this farm. Despite the efforts of their leader, Ginger, the chickens

struggle to organize effectively. However, a turning point arises when Mrs. Tweedy becomes more profit-oriented and introduces a pie-making machine, which signifies a faster and more agonizing death for the chickens. The arrival of Rocky, a rooster from the US who falsely claims to possess the ability to fly, changes the dynamics. His demonstration of pseudo-flight inspires Ginger to rally the others, using Rocky as an example of achieving the seemingly impossible. Rocky's charismatic appearance and self-portrayal as a flying rooster influence the other chickens (masses) with an “if I can do it, so can you” mentality. Ultimately, the chickens revolt against their exploitation and successfully escape the farm, gaining their freedom. Despite their inability to fly, they construct a plane and effectively achieve flight. After escaping from Mrs. Tweedy's farm, the chickens create their own farm on a remote island, free from Mrs. Tweedy's machine and influence.

While it may appear to be a children's animated film set on a chicken farm, it contains political subtexts. It serves as a promising foundation for a new agenda distinct from post-politics. As Mouffe's theory demonstrates, a radical democratic approach can serve as a framework for left populism, as seen in the chickens' transformation from initial hopelessness to eagerness due to the rooster Rocky's populist discourse. This indicates the possibility of an alternative, which should be effectively communicated to the public. An illustrative example intended to inspire confidence in the people's ability to achieve seemingly impossible feats. If they are unable to fly, they have the ability to construct a flying craft. Furthermore, the conclusion highlights the island farm's enhanced sustainability and environmental friendliness, traits that become evident in the second film.

In the recently released sequel, *Chicken Run: Dawn of the Nugget* (2023), the story follows Ginger's daughter, Molly, on a quest to explore beyond their remote island. Eager to see what lies beyond, Molly embarks on an adventure. Along the way, she encounters an advertisement on the back of a truck for “Fun-Land Farms: Where chickens find their happy endings”. This advertisement, reminiscent of the themes where every activity is crafted to distract from the inevitable “happy end” which is death, reflects the culture of advertising within the context of late capitalism's postmodern logic (See Chapter 2).

Intrigued, Molly joins the farm in search of fulfillment. However, the reality at Fun-Land Farms is not as idyllic as advertised. It turns out to be a large factory owned by Mrs. Tweedy. In contrast to the pie-making machine in the first film, this time she has an entire factory. While the chickens this factory farm appear content, they are actually being sedated and manipulated into believing they are happily following the farm's rules, striving for the supposed goal of reaching the sun, which is, in reality, the grinding machine. The factory owners achieve this by opiating them with personalized electronic neck-tags, perhaps similar to today's personalized algorithms of social media.

The farm owners aim to ensure the chickens' "happiness" because, as depicted in the later advertisement video, the typical reaction of chickens being taken to the processing machine is one of "fear" and "panic", causing their muscles to tense and resulting in the formation of knots in the connective tissues. This, in turn, leads to "tough, dry, and flavorless" meat. The advertisement suggests that through the application of "science", this scenario can be altered. The voiceover in the advertisement poses the question, "What if science could change a chicken's response to fear? What if it could make a chicken happy to be processed?"

At this juncture, the emphasis on "happiness" is highly ironic, given that it aligns precisely with Erik Swyngedouw's definition of post-politics as the reduction of governance practices to the biopolitical management of the "happiness" of the population (Swyngedouw 2018, xix).

Similar to this procedure, neoliberalism has convinced people that this consensual system is in their best interest, promoting the notion that each individual is free to achieve their own "happy end". Throughout this thesis, it is evident that in the realm of post-politics, governance is expertly managed and legitimized through participatory processes, presenting itself as grounded in "scientific" authority.

Consequently, individuals are expected to respond positively, choosing contentment despite adverse circumstances. Activities such as unwinding with Netflix after long shifts, seeking guidance from life coaches, or socializing over drinks after work are deemed sufficient in this context. In other words, just as "science" is depicted as making chickens happy to be processed in the film, it is making people content with accepting inequalities, precariousness, and the erosion of social rights. Neoliberalism

aims for individuals to find happiness. It does not want their muscles to be tense and flavorless but rather desires them to be delicious.

In order to transcend post-politics, we should concentrate on how the chickens liberated themselves from the illusory contentment of the factories and established their own community: In the end of the film, they return to their village on the island and continuously endeavor to rescue those who are still affected by Mrs. Tweedy's factory.

Their actions in the village are crucial if we aim to overcome post-politics, assuming such a thing exists. They sustain their lives on the island through production, collaborative work, and the use of local resources to construct shelters (small wooden cabins). Their approach is nature-oriented, ensuring no harm to trees, and relies on renewable energy sources (mills). Urbanization is adapted to the topography, prioritizing communal interests over private ones.

Drawing from this imaginative perspective, we should look beyond large factories like "Fun-Land Farms". In other words, rather than advancing global interdependence and globalization solely through financial markets, a shift towards local development, characterized by heightened environmental awareness and reduced consumption, has the potential to benefit the public. Additionally, there is a need for increased public involvement in decision-making processes and political affairs.

Because of the post-political context, for many, the term "politics" has acquired a negative connotation, associated with misused power, corruption, electoral tactics, and populism. However, politics encompasses more than these negative aspects, and it is essential to remind people of this broader understanding. Membership in a political party or participation in activities such as organizing rallies, protests, and parades should not be perceived as negative actions. Instead, these forms of civic engagement should increasingly be utilized to challenge the predetermined agendas of governments.

Diverse ideas should not be marginalized, regardless of how unconventional they may seem; they should be represented within the framework of the law and through the processes of political institutions.

Economists, politicians, political scientists, activists, and ordinary citizens should be encouraged to participate more actively in policy-making processes, parliamentary activities, and political party engagements, rather than leaving these roles primarily to big business administrators or CEOs.

An alternative viewpoint suggests that these suggestions may be ineffective because post-politics is inherently unsustainable and has already shown signs of decline, characterized by increased regulations, state intervention, and the emergence of extremist political agendas. The subsequent subchapter delves into this topic by examining specific examples.

3.2 END OF POST-POLITICS?

The post-political discourse has significantly constrained the political imagination of individuals, rendering it more challenging for them to conceive of alternative frameworks. The widely known assertion by Thatcher, “There is no alternative”, has become deeply entrenched in the collective consciousness, shaping perceptions and limiting the consideration of alternative political possibilities.

The expanding body of literature on neoliberalism indicates a sustained influence despite periodic crises. In conjunction with social phenomena associated with post-politics, such as inequality, contemporary global challenges like immigration waves, the Israel-Palestine conflict, the Ukraine-Russia conflict, and the expansion of NATO, collectively suggest a world in a state of destabilization. These multifaceted issues have spurred activists, economists, politicians, and researchers from various ideological backgrounds to advocate for the development of a new program. Nevertheless, as of now, no comprehensive alternative has emerged to address these complex and interrelated challenges.

In the current crisis, akin to how Friedrich Hayek or Milton Friedman devised solutions in past crises, there is a pressing need for innovative approaches that can effectively address the challenges at hand. However, it is imperative that these solutions do not lead to a state of affairs reminiscent of post-politics, where the range of political options becomes limited and the potential for genuine change is stifled.

Although it may appear that there is no change, at times, subtle shifts do take place. Donald Trump's controversial presidency between 2017-2021 marked a significant resurgence of politics in an assertive manner, aligning with the predictions of thinkers such as Mouffe, Brown, or Žižek. However, his tenure was subsequently succeeded by Joe Biden, who embodies more of a representation of the post-political status quo.

As extremist movements gain traction, the prospect of overcoming post-politics seems remote, leading to a situation where we find ourselves reluctantly accepting the status quo of post-politics instead of confronting the intricate dynamics of contemporary politics as shaped by these fundamentalist movements. Brown notes their mantra as follows: “Make America Great Again” (Trump), “France for the French” (Le Pen and the National Front), “Take Back Control” (Brexit), “Our Culture, Our Home, Our Germany” (Alternative for Germany), “Pure Poland, White Poland” (Poland’s Law and Justice

Party), “Keep Sweden Swedish” (Sweden Democrats) (Brown 2019, 5). As evidenced by these slogans, politics is sometimes operating in a notably adversarial manner.

The following subchapter briefly explores these subtle changes by examining specific elections and raises questions about the validity of the concept of post-politics itself.

3.2.1 Elections around the globe: Brazil, United States, Türkiye

In post-political contexts, elections are frequently seen as the principal means of bringing about change. This perception stems from the notion that in a well-operating neoliberal system, issues often necessitate technical or technological solutions that are beyond the grasp of ordinary citizens and are therefore handled by technocrats acting on behalf of the populace.

Consequently, elections are pivotal moments when the electorate can assess the competence of the incumbent government in implementing the correct neoliberal instruments. If the current administration is perceived as lacking in this competence, the electoral process provides an opportunity for citizens to choose leaders who are better equipped to navigate the complexities of neoliberal governance and steer the country toward desired outcomes.

However, this perception is misleading, as elections are not inherently transformative but rather function as commodities within the political market. As previously discussed, in post-political societies, citizens are viewed more as consumers than active participants in shaping political outcomes. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the European Parliament elections, which are considered second-order elections, as explored in Chapter 2.2.1 on the analysis of the technocratic structure of the EU.

In this context, the significant financial resources allocated to political campaigns underscore the influence of business and market interests, as well as corporate and financial elites, who invest substantial sums in elections, candidates, lobbyists, and lawmakers to cultivate a political environment conducive to their objectives (Dean 2014, 294).

However, recent elections worldwide indicate a growing willingness to challenge the status quo, at least in terms of discourse. For instance, the 2022 Brazilian presidential

election, the 2020 US presidential election, and the 2019 Turkish local elections exemplify challenges to the neoliberal incumbents in their respective countries.

In 2022, Brazil held a significant presidential election featuring Jair Messias Bolsonaro and Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva as the leading contenders. Bolsonaro, the incumbent, represented the neoliberal agenda, while Lula sought to replace the current government, he emphasized democratic principles. This election marked a pivotal moment in Brazilian politics, with both candidates presenting distinct visions for the country's future.

Lula, a candidate associated with leftist ideologies, secured victory, signaling a popular rejection of the openly neoliberal platform advocated by his opponent. This outcome reflects a significant expression of public sentiment in favor of alternative political directions.

Lula's opponent, the ex-president, adopted an attitude that resembled that of Donald Trump. He was known for his identity as a businessman, as well as for his reality television program, which involved judging the business skills of a group of contestants. He was also recognized for making a cameo appearance in the popular film *Home Alone*. With a background in television and business, he evoked comparisons to Ronald Reagan, as both were popular culture figures affiliated with the Republican Party.

However, his consistent use of populism and anti-establishment rhetoric can be interpreted as a manifestation of post-politics, where traditional left-right divisions are blurred, and the public sphere for political discourse is diminished. Consequently, his tenure which began in 2017 was marked by a notably pessimistic outlook on politics, culminating in the refusal of his followers to accept the election results. This discontent led to the infamous events of January 6, 2021, when the United States Capitol Building in Washington, D.C., was stormed by a mob of supporters of then-U.S. President Donald Trump, just two months after his defeat in the 2020 presidential election.

He lost to Joe Biden in 2020 election. Biden, from the Democratic Party, made promises aimed at addressing issues caused by the neoliberal system, such as employment (“We’ll create millions of good paying American jobs and get the job market back on the path to full employment”) and healthcare (“I’ll not only restore Obamacare, I’ll build on it”), among others (Politico 2023).

These pledges were a response to the significant competition Joe Biden encountered during the Democratic Party primaries, notably from contenders like Bernie Sanders, in the presidential campaign. Sanders notably brought socialist terminology into the mainstream discourse and employed it without reservation. The influence of Sanders is evident in the language and commitments of the current Biden administration. His discourse serves as a countermeasure to post-politics.

“In my view, it's time we had democratic socialism for working families, not just Wall Street, billionaires and large corporations. It means that we should not be providing welfare for corporations, huge tax breaks for the very rich, or trade policies which boost corporate profits as workers lose their jobs. It means that we create a government that works for works for all of us, not just powerful special interests. It means that economic rights must be an essential part of what America stands for.” (Sanders 2015 as cited in Vox 2015)

Sanders advocated for a departure from merely accepting neoliberal principles as given truths, instead challenging them directly. However, it comes as no surprise that he was unable to secure the candidacy, as previously mentioned, since post-political systems tend to resist radical change in the long run.

Hence, these subtle changes can serve as minimal illustrations that change is feasible. Another example of such a change was observed in the municipal victories of the main opposition in Türkiye in 2019.

As previously mentioned, the AK Party implemented its most extensive neoliberal program in Türkiye. Its electoral triumphs since 2002 have been significant in shaping the country's trajectory. However, in 2019, major cities such as Istanbul, Izmir, Ankara, Antalya, and Adana opted for the main opposition CHP (Republican People's Party) instead. The discourse of the main opposition exhibited an anti-oligarchic stance against neoliberalism. In particular, İmamoğlu's election campaign prominently displayed the radical democracy approach of Chantal Mouffe (See Chapter 3.1.1).

The CHP formed broad coalitions with diverse parties in opposition to the AK Party. The party's leader at the time, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, along with each candidate, consistently employed an anti-neoliberal discourse.

One of his statements serves as a notable example of his steadfast opposition to post-politics.

“The whole world has begun to see the welfare state. If there is a state, it exists for its citizens. Neoliberal policies were built on low wages and high profits. It is now understood that this is not valid, it should not be, and we have entered an era where everyone can earn income, live in peace, and the state will unconditionally support citizens in need. Democracy will be the guarantor of this” (Kılıçdaroğlu 2020 as cited in Anadolu Ajansı 2020)

Despite their anti-neoliberal rhetoric and victories in 2019, Kılıçdaroğlu and his allies were unable to secure a win in the 2023 general elections. Does this suggest that people are satisfied with post-politics? This investigation into post-politics leads us to the final chapter.

3.2.2 Is post-politics a valid concept?

Post-politics is primarily a philosophical critique that requires empirical validation. If post-politics arises as a result of neoliberal technocracies, it is essential to substantiate this assertion through empirical investigation into the benefits gained by businesses, politicians, mayors, citizens, workers and etc. Such inquiry should explore the potential for divergent political-economic agendas. For instance, it should assess whether it is feasible to challenge the neoliberal underpinnings of the EU from within, and whether the EU can operate as an international community that prioritizes the interests of the majority over those of the minority.

Numerous academic studies examine the dynamics of economic governance, focusing on aspects such as financialization, trade unions, labor relations, governmental and parliamentary influence, as well as the impact on constituents. These works yield diverse conclusions. Nevertheless, it would be unwarranted to assert that contemporary neoliberalism is operating smoothly and devoid of challenges.

In the analysis of the European Union, the existence of a democratic deficit was posited, and this deficit was attributed to both institutional and psychological factors. Such a deficit is not surprising, since the critique of post-politics inherently implies a gradual erosion of democratic principles.

Hence, the concept of post-politics is broad and may not always be the most suitable framework for academic analysis, as it can encompass a wide range of challenges and complexities related to democracy or neoliberal economic policies. Furthermore,

issues such as corruption and monopolization do not necessarily originate from neoliberalism; rather, neoliberalism seeks to eliminate these concerns in pursuit of a more efficient market. However, the discourse on post-politics often links these issues with neoliberal democracies.

While neoliberalism may not inherently promote corruption or inequality, the empirical evidence presented throughout this thesis suggests that it ultimately leads to these outcomes. Consequently, in order to restore genuine political engagement, it is imperative that post-politics be consistently disclosed in academic literature and political discourse.

CONCLUSION

This thesis examines the intricate dynamics of neoliberalism and its repercussions on political demands, democratic processes, and societal structures. The findings reveal a transformative impact of neoliberal policies, which prioritize individualism, competition, and market mechanisms over collective interests. This prioritization has led to the depoliticization of the economy and the transformation of politics into a technocratic tool overseen by professionals. This phenomenon, known as post-politics, has marginalized political demands that diverge from neoliberal state interests, fostering a post-political consensus that perceives alternative programs as adversarial and unscientific.

The research questions that guide this study are as follows:

How are political demands that diverge from neoliberal state interests treated within the political sphere?

To what extent are alternative approaches viable in the context of neoliberalism?

How does the neoliberal environment influence the nurturing or threat to democratic practices?

To what extent are political demands that diverge from neoliberal state interests marginalized in political discourse and decision-making processes?

Our findings indicate that political demands diverging from neoliberal state interests are indeed marginalized within the political sphere. The depoliticization brought about by neoliberalism has limited the scope for alternative approaches, although pockets of resistance and alternative visions persist. Movements advocating for social justice, environmental sustainability, and democratic participation continue to challenge neoliberal hegemony. One notable alternative approach is Chantal Mouffe's concept of radical democracy, which emphasizes agonistic pluralism and active citizen participation in political decision-making. This offers a viable path beyond neoliberal constraints. However, the hegemony of neoliberalism poses a substantial threat to democracies by reshaping democracy according to market interests and marginalizing essential ideas and practices of democratic governance. Therefore, there is an urgent need to critically evaluate and challenge the neoliberal paradigm to safeguard democratic values and practices in contemporary society.

In conclusion, this thesis has provided insights into the impact of neoliberalism on political structures and societal perceptions. It has highlighted the challenges posed by post-politics and the importance of alternative approaches like radical democracy in reimagining democratic politics. Moving forward, it is imperative to continue exploring and advocating for alternative visions that prioritize collective well-being and democratic values over market-driven individualism.

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