

LECTERN

**INDEPENDENT
JOURNAL OF
STUDENTS**

Title: Action–Reaction: On the Edge of Reactivity

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Published by Lectern Journal

Edited by Fırat Güney

Lectern Journal, Vol. 1, Iss. 1, October 2025, pp. 65-83

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Abstract

In the article, I aimed to examine the thresholds of reactivity at different levels by observing how social actors establish various action boundaries at both the individual and group levels. Drawing on social action theory developed by Weber (1968) and threshold models of collective behavior developed by Granovetter (1978), I analyzed the interplay of people's habitus, environmental factors, and temporal conditions that shape their responses to perceptual injustices. Beginning with ethnographic observations of daily life on the Marmaray railway between Istanbul and Izmit, the research synthesizes gender-based interventions, inter-ethnic conflicts, class-based pogroms, morally motivated riots, and religiously motivated fanaticism within the framework of historical and contemporary cases. I considered norms, cultural codes, laws, and power hierarchies as factors that influence individuals' acceptable and unacceptable behavior, concluding that reactivity thresholds depend on the balance between social recognition, legitimacy, risks, and potential rewards. At this point, I realized that tolerance or perceptual differences can transform into collective actions, shaping the spread or suppression of social reactions of approval or disapproval, thus drawing new perspectives for the behavioral patterns that govern participation, resistance, and the evolution of normative behavior in different social groups while witnessing how individuals navigate between passive and active behaviors.

Keywords: Reactivity, Thresholds, Social Action, Collective Behavior, Habitus, Objection, Violence, Acceptable, Unacceptable



Everyday Reactivity Of The Life

Objection can be defined as the act of expressing or feeling opposition to or dislike of something or someone. Many people are able to object to something or someone in their daily life. However, humans usually choose to stay silent towards any kind of inequalities or injustices in social life. The first explanation that comes to my mind is that of course, human beings are inevitably in social interaction so that its perception of these unfairness might be weighed in the balance of its threshold on the act of expressing, and whether the opposition might have been found wanting. To analyze more efficiently, I decide to share my own memories about possibilities of objection in specific conditions. In the destination of marmaray (Istanbul Railway Transportation), the places serving to people by providing sitting tend to be full at the very beginning of the journey. Whenever I take the train, I observe individuals who wish to sit but are unable to do so due to the lack of available seats. Unlike the ones wanting to stay on their feet or sit on the floor, these people have to stand because they can't find a chance. Then, if someone stands up or even tries to stand up, or more even just makes them feel that they will leave the train, people compete with each other to sit in every available seat. Their competition seems arbitrary but reveals the implicit rules of interaction. Such competitive behavior might be expected of children, yet adults are generally expected to recognize their rights and exercise objection where appropriate. But my experiences show me that the current situation is related to the zero-sum game, and might be a way of beginning to investigate thresholds of reactivity.

Firstly, the inspiring thing coming to my mind when I examine the transportation process in marmaray is to search an answer to the question of objection that arguing why do people escape to find their rights or if it is needed to be more specific the question by asking it as why do not people resist to their fate. They can say that " it is my turn to sit, you have sat for so long " but they can also choose not to intervene. Possible outcomes are emerging, if they resist: to access the seat quickly or to discuss with the people. Many of them are just avoiding to discuss but when they have the opportunity of excuses like being ill or pregnant or old or disfigured body, the situation of victory is quite obvious. No one can show any kind of opposition to them because they have the priority of sitting by standing mostly on cultural codes and rarely legal codes of society. I call that point of change as threshold. It is the transformation of conditions meaning that the time has come to reorganize. Nothing can stay the same, new kinds of regulations are emerged. The old one which was unacceptable is being altered now with the new one which is acceptable.



In this essay, the main examination will be to investigate the conditions that determine the limits of social objection and obedience, determining the acceptable and unacceptable aspects of violence and activism, which are reflections of tensions between people, and the projection of threshold values in this process. Interpretation of large-scale or small-scale social and individual movements and resistances will help me to understand how the social perception and interpretation of factors such as gender, nation, class hierarchy, morality and religion shape the concepts of objection, obedience and to what heights they raise their own threshold values. The main subject that I address will be the transition of the social person to action and the interaction with the habitus he/she is in, and what and who determines the limits and thresholds in her/his own field.



Social Action Theory of Max Weber

When we delve into the roots of the concept of reactivity, the main subject we will address will be the actions of individuals. Although it seems reasonable to think that each individual in society tends to react differently from each other existentially, social action is more likely to show similarities in the direction of human habitus and the influence of the environment. "Social action, which includes both failures to act and passive acquiescence, may be oriented to the past, present, or expected future behavior of others." (Weber, 1968, p.22) Since the actions of individuals cannot be isolated from the temporal plane, explaining them with the cyclical or linear concept in which they are examined will allow us to reach a more accurate conclusion.

"Social action is not identical either with the similar actions of many persons or with every action influenced by other persons." (Weber, 1968, p.23) When examining the individual in the transition from the subject dimension to the subject status, meaningful and rational explanations of his/her behaviors should be taken into account. While social actions are formed by the shaping of environmental factors, the purpose of the underlying triggering factor should be allowed for consideration. Weber gives the example of people using umbrellas when it is raining for this situation. When society takes action in line with external factors, it shows an imitative pattern rather than a meaningful behaviour. In such cases, it would not be logical to interpret the action as a social action. Situations where imitation is done for social reasons, for example traditional patterns, become meaningful. Although the boundaries between social action and other collective behaviors, as I have mentioned, are often intertwined, we can separate these two similar phenomena by organizing social ones in more detail.

"Social action, like all action, may be oriented in four ways: instrumentally rational, value-rational, affectual, and traditional." (Weber, 1968, p.24) Instrumental-rational action is the action that the individual takes and implements in line with his/her goal. It takes action by interacting with the person in line with environmental factors. Value-rational action is carried out in line with the person's beliefs, abstracted from the awareness of external factors in order to realize a certain value. Emotional action occurs with the effects that external stimuli create in the individual. It is an expression of the emotional change experienced by the person. Traditional action consists of the continuity of habitual movements. The individual imitates the actions he/she has done in the past; it is an impulsive automatic reaction rather than a logical one.



"Action is instrumentally rational when the end, the means, and the secondary results are all rationally taken into account and weighed." (Weber, 1968, p.26) Although the behaviors exhibited by humans, who are social creatures, are categorized with various types of actions, the achievement of their goals in line with the purpose of these actions can be placed on a rational plane with the acceptance of social consciousness. When an emotional reaction or a traditional behavior exceeds the acceptable threshold, the action becomes rational in perceptual reality. On the other hand, these actions and their types that constitute reactivity are often intertwined in life and in the stages of application. Human consciousness interprets this complex system, which is interconnected, on a holistic level and cannot perceive it in a particular way.

Social relations that exist during activism are formed by more than one actor and each of these actors follow their own and others' actions and establish meaningful relationships with them. Reactions to an event that occurs in daily life are shaped by the perpetrators of this event, the victims around them and the witnesses who watch them. "The subjective meaning of a social relationship may change, thus a political relationship once based on solidarity may develop into a conflict of interests." (Weber, 1968, p.28) Social relations may change as time progresses, with the justifications they are based on taking on a new form. While the origin of social reaction may initially be a bond of solidarity with the instinct to live together, over time the situation may become a focus of individual interest.



Threshold Models of Collective Behavior by Granovetter

“The key concept is that of "threshold": the number or proportion of others who must make one decision before a given actor does so; this is the point where net benefits begin to exceed net costs for that particular actor.” (Granovetter, 1978, p.1420) The threshold indicates that a certain number of people must participate in order for the actions to continue in an event. The ability to reach a collective level of responsiveness is possible with the environmental support of external actors. The initiation of collective participation requires the crossing of a threshold determined by the perception capacity of human consciousness. Since this capacity may represent lower thresholds for some people, they will react before others. If it is thought that a sufficient number has been reached in the continuation of the process, other people will stop hesitating and start to react.

"Knowing the norms, preferences, motives, and beliefs of participants in collective behavior can, in most cases, only provide a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the explanation of outcomes." (Granovetter, 1978, p.1421) Although knowing the motivations of individuals to make sense of and examine the action helps us reach a meaningful conclusion, it is not enough. For the interaction of collective behaviors, the situations of social relations with each other should also be considered. An individual's behavior in society may, with short-term variables, turn into desires that are very different from the initially targeted desires. Though the decisions taken by human nature in this multi-factorial variability generally make sense, they will become illogical when examined at the subject level.

“A very small change in the distribution of preferences generates a large difference in the outcome.” (Granovetter, 1978, p.1421) On the other hand, it is also possible that small changes in an individual's decisions can have a large-scale effect on society. A change in existing threshold levels can lead to social action in obedience or rebellion. In this case, if we assume that a few people experience a decrease in their tolerance, they are more likely to react, and then the formation of collective consciousness can occur more quickly and effectively with increased participation.

Acceptable reactivity and Unacceptable reactivity seem to be directly related to being able to exceed the threshold value in this process. The approval of social mobility is realized with the approval of the actors in this process, then their participation and the involvement of other people. I intend to draw a clearer and more



understandable portfolio by examining the methodology building on my research in line with the theses of Weber and Granovetter and using it to explain how the threshold value and social action affect reactivity by exemplifying it with various events.



Reactivity on The Level of Gender

A news from Independent Turkey (2020), “Kadir Ş., 20, who is preparing for university in Konya, saw a person beating his girlfriend in the park in Kosova Neighborhood of Selçuklu district. The young man who went to separate the couple encountered verbal and physical intervention from the attacker Özgür Duran. Özgür Duran, who chased the young man for a while and was hit, fell to the ground after receiving a knife blow during the struggle. Duran, who was taken to Selçuk University Medical Faculty Hospital by an ambulance called to the scene due to the wound he received to his chest, lost his life despite the intervention.”

“I couldn't stand it when I saw him beating a woman” by Kadir Ş. (Independent Türkçe, 2020).

During his interrogation at the police station, the young man reportedly said that he saw a woman being beaten, that he couldn't stand it and intervened, that he fled the scene after the attacker beat him as well, and that he and the attacker who was chasing him had a struggle.

This incident, which came to Türkiye's agenda in a frightening way in the first half of 2020, is still met with skepticism by the society about calling it a murder. Although there is still uncertainty in the public eye about whether Kadir's behavior was murder or self-defense, the court panel evaluated Kadir Şeker's crime as "deliberate murder" and first sentenced him to life imprisonment, and later discharged him with the objections and legal procedures made in the process.

This issue, which has led to various questions about whether violence is acceptable, can show us how the gender factor plays a role in determining the threshold value. In Turkey, where violence against women is constantly on the agenda, This case illustrates a person who claims to have committed a crime to save a woman who was subjected to violence and declares that he killed the man by accident is accepted by a large segment of the society and is seen as a savior figure regardless of the consequences of his aggressive behavior, is a very good example to explain the threshold values of reactivity.



Kadir, who took action as a result of an instant emotional reaction, was found to be acquitted by the society after receiving sufficient approval. The initial decision that the legal process made about him was a similar punishment that could have been given to another criminal in a similar process, stemming from legal regulations. The social reactions that continued during his arrest and conviction, and the collective consciousness that started a rebellion against the legal status, enabled Kadir to be released.



Reactivity on The Level of Nation

According to BBC News Turkish (2021), “Tension continues in the neighborhood after 18-year-old Emirhan Yalçın was stabbed to death as a result of a fight between a group of Syrian immigrants and Turkish youth in the Battalgazi District of Ankara's Altındağ district on Tuesday evening. While a Syrian speaking to BBC Turkish asked for help from Turkish shopkeepers to take his family out of the neighborhood and leave Ankara, it can be seen that there are groups of young men "patrolling" the neighborhood. On Wednesday night, hundreds of people attacked shops and houses belonging to Syrians, and many residences and workplaces were damaged.”

These incidents that took place in Ankara Altındağ quickly resonated on the agenda of the whole country. The fight between two young men, a Syrian and a Turkish man, initially turned into a large-scale social disaster, which brought about many incidents. Syrian immigrants, who were held responsible for the incident, became targets and witnessed various violent scenes. It may be the case that small changes in individual threshold values can trigger large crowds within this incident. The events that developed around the two young men arguing at the beginning show us the acceptable and unacceptable aspects of violence. In this murder where a young Turkish man was killed, the act of the Syrian perpetrator of violence was perceived as unacceptable, and then reactions were shown as an acceptable response to this unacceptable act.

The fact that the people involved in the incidents were generally young, Turkish, and had criminal records from low socioeconomic conditions can show how threshold values are positioned in different subjects. Although not all of the local people agree with these behaviors towards Syrian refugees, middle-aged and employed people state that they stand against these events. The lower threshold of reaction of social actions in a certain group (young, Turkish and criminal related) can be perceived as a more passive reaction when directed to another group (old, Turkish, tradesmen).

Despite the over-reactionary attitudes of the attackers that are criticized by many citizens, we should also assume that there is a potential to participate in social mobility and rebellion from certain issues. Some citizens who claim that Syrian refugees have a special status by the state, are exempted from various taxes for workplaces, are enriched by the state with social aids, have reached a numerical majority in



neighborhoods and made Turks a minority, have lowered real estate prices in the region with illegal construction, have disturbed the peace and serenity on the streets and frightened women, and have disrupted social order by forming gangs, state that although they do not participate in violent incidents, they also approve the behaviors to a certain extent. As can be seen here, the actions of individuals with a low threshold of reaction are approved at a reactive level even if the participation of individuals with a higher threshold is not ensured.

The fact that the reason for the events to take place in this way was a murder, the killing of a young Turk by a Syrian, is perceived as a reasonable reason to take action that can be used as an excuse. In order to examine how social actions are shaped by the influence of external factors (security, economic, social and cultural) and how obedience to state authority is transformed from there into a social rebellion, the striking events that took place in Ankara Altındağ offer us a detailed analysis.



Reactivity on The Level of Class

A Pogrom Event in Istanbul, 1955 is described by Euronews Turkey (2021), “The events of September 6-7, when attacks were carried out on non-Muslims living in Istanbul and described as a ‘historical shame’, are still remembered. In the events, the homes, workplaces, schools, churches, crosses and valuables of the non-Muslim minorities of Istanbul were burned and destroyed. In 1954, the Greek Cypriots launched an independence struggle against the British colonial administration of the time, and the government in Greece brought the issue of the right of the people of Cyprus to self-determination to the agenda of the United Nations (UN). In parallel with this process, in 1955, the media in Turkey wrote news containing hate speech against the Greek people living in Istanbul; the press compared how prosperous and happy the Greeks of Istanbul lived to the Turkish minorities of Western Thrace. This fueled the increasing tension between the two peoples.”

The news of the bomb attack on Atatürk's house in Thessaloniki on September 5, 1955 tragically wounded the public conscience with the manipulations of the Turkish media. After this brutal attack, which was claimed to have been carried out on Atatürk's legacy, nationalist groups living especially in the rural areas of Turkey took action. Gangs including many attackers started riots in Istanbul on the evening of September 6 and looted the city for 2 days. The government, which was late in taking precautions against the incidents or was said to have acted late on purpose by some circles, was tried on the grounds that they were guilty in a series of courts established on Yassı Island after the military coup in 1960, 5 years after the incidents.

The triggering of a rebellion by social movement as seen in this incident, targeting marginalized people with minority status and looting their properties is one of the most striking examples of acceptable violence. The attacks, which were launched on the grounds of the Cyprus incidents and the attack on Atatürk's house, continued for two days.

The fact that non-Muslims living in prosperity and wealth in Istanbul gave up their properties and went abroad as a result of the incidents is one of the most obvious examples of class change and wealth transfer in the early history of the Turkish republic. After September 6-7, the rural bourgeois class that Turkey needed when it embraced capitalism in 1950 became stronger. I think that the behaviors of the Turkish bourgeois class that the Menderes Government started to form in Adana, Izmir and Istanbul were turned a blind eye to



during this process is important when examining the threshold values of acceptable and planned violence, or in other words pogrom, reactionism.

Especially after the Second World War, the Turkish people, who experienced very difficult economic crises, tried to legitimize violence against foreign non-Muslims in Istanbul, whom they saw as enemies, yielded results. Contrary to these events, Turks living with non-Muslims in Istanbul and neighboring them opposed the events. As a result of the cruelty committed, they positioned themselves on the side of their educated non-Muslim neighbors against the poor people coming from Anatolia. During that night, the entire Beyoğlu district turned into hell, everywhere was looted and non-Muslims who were caught were lynched. A few people among them took the goods from the shops they looted, and some even ate chocolate for the first time in their lives while looting the patisseries. As can be seen, although these events seem to be the result of a series of events triggered by national feelings and foreign policy, they actually have a class basis. These attacks, which were carried out by the poor masses coming from Anatolia, on a large number of middle-upper class groups, in addition to the Greeks who were targeted, make us question the economic dimension, and the fact that the state accepted the violence and remained silent makes us question the power of the dominant authority while interpreting the threshold values of reactivity.



Reactivity on The Level of Morality

One of the most interesting events of December 2024 is summarized as follows according to Medyascope sources (2024): “Luigi Mangione has been arrested on suspicion of murdering UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson. He has been hailed on social media as a “modern-day Robin Hood” for his alleged armed protest against the injustice of the American healthcare system. Law enforcement has described Luigi as a “cold-blooded killer.” Mangione, 26, has divided American society with his three-page manifesto against the country’s “most expensive yet inefficient” healthcare system. Luigi Mangione described health insurance companies as “parasites” in his three-page manifesto. Questioning the fact that the US has the most expensive healthcare system in the world but is 49th in life expectancy, Luigi Mangione said, “I apologize, but it had to be done.” He emphasized in the manifesto that he planned and financed his action alone.”

Mangione, who was ignited as a reaction to the American Health System and emphasized inequalities in his manifesto, is seen as a savior by some segments of the American public. When he was tried as part of a murder investigation, demands for his release by the public resonated widely. While various circles debate whether this act was a crime or not, Luigi's personal history is also among the issues taken into consideration. Although the criticisms received were tried to be explained by basing the crime on its individuality and the law, the fact that Mangione came from a well-educated, white and wealthy family led to questions in shaping public conscience. Where would the threshold of acceptable reaction be drawn if the murder was committed by a lower-class black person under the same circumstances?

The fact that many countries other than America reacted to this rebellion, which can be considered as a rebellion against the intense exploitation of the health system, shows us how social relations are perceived from an international perspective. Many people from different geographies of the world describe Luigi's act as justified and put pressure on social media for his release. This movement, which first started at the local level, mobilized many societies as the events were gradually adopted and grew with a superior perspective. I interpret my assessment as the people who found a legitimate reason or actor on this excuse, losing their patience, in other words, the threshold being exceeded. When it was understood that the value which could be obtained was greater than the concessions that had to be made, social movement became inevitable.



The perception that the murder was committed system-oriented rather than individual-oriented, with the personal existence of the murdered CEO being forgotten, is another factor affecting the legitimacy of reaction. It seems possible to create political and economic regulations in the process that progresses within all this chaos, by measuring the reactions given and evaluating them by the authorities.



Reactivity on The Level of Religion

The burning of the Madımak Hotel, recorded in history as the Sivas Massacre, is reported by BBC News Turkish (2015) as follows: “July 2, 1993 is remembered as the date of a massacre. On that day, 33 of the intellectuals and artists who went to Sivas to attend the Pir Sultan Abdal Festival lost their lives when the hotel they were staying at was burned down. Intellectuals, artists and poets had gone to Sivas to participate in the four-day festival program. One of those who spoke at the opening of the festival on July 1 was writer Aziz Nesin. A leaflet distributed two days before the massacre was a sign, although it was not a harbinger of what would happen on July 2. The leaflet mentioned Salman Rushdie's book "Satanic Verses" published in the *Aydınlık* newspaper, where Aziz Nesin was the editor-in-chief at the time, and targeted Nesin. The declaration criticized the hosting of the festival by the Sivas Governor at the time, Ahmet Karabilgin, and said of Nesin, "He can walk around the city as if he were mocking Muslims.””

The events that took place in Sivas on July 2, 1993 are not a coincidence, but an inevitable result of many actions that took place one after another. This event, which revealed a meaningful result that social actions act together with their past, present and future, opened a deep wound in the history of Turkey that cannot be healed. During this process, the secular segment to which the reaction was directed was accused of infidelity by fanatics.

The victims were accused of provoking the public by state authorities and the government, and the organization of such an event in Sivas legitimized the violence. The public, who were encouraged to attack throughout the day, first crossed the threshold when local Islamic organizations demonized Nesin and then imposed them to burn him in the fires of hell. We can understand how this massacre, which took place under frightening conditions, was acceptable in a religious city like Sivas, rather than in the relatively urbanized and secular cities of Turkey, according to the concept of violence.

Following the incidents, the Prime Minister of the time, Tansu Çiller, said that thankfully no harm came to the people outside the hotel, the security forces did not take action during the fire, the delay in requests for help for hours, and the silence of the city's mayor and governor. In this context, that can be observed that both the authorities and the local public opinion lowered the threshold for accepting violence and instrumentalizing it, both at a social and legal level.



Understanding Limits and Reactivity

While continuing my research, the methods I considered and the different areas I exemplified helped me to examine the changes in the formation, growth and termination process of the reaction. The study I conducted on social action and its boundaries, under what conditions, and what kind of triggering reasons it needs proves the existence of threshold values of reactivity. By situating social action within its boundaries and analyzing the conditions and triggers that set it in motion, I emphasized that responsiveness is not random but emerges from structured interactions between habitus, external factors, and temporal conditions. This interesting question that came to my mind while sitting in Marmaray would have never existed if a few people had given way to others. As can be seen, although the perception capacity that life offers us seems to be the result of a series of coincidences at the moment, it will actually be understood that it has deep connections on the causes and origins of events with sufficient examination and knowledge. The human species, which is inevitably social in terms of society, decides on its actions and reactions within its own field, that is, under the guidance of the habitus it is in, in its interactions with both its own species and other species, under the influence of external factors and the temporal plane. The formation of this habitus and its interaction with other habituses may be the subject of another research in the upcoming period, however, it may direct us as anthropologists to more theoretical level inquiries.



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