

MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY | DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS

WEEK 09 / 14

Turkish Surrealism & The Cockroach Phenomenon

Absurdist coping as a rational response to a shrinking economic horizon.

Economics Concept: **Behavioral Economics & Coping Under Inflation**

ECONOMIC REALITY

Coping Under Declining Mobility

- When real purchasing power falls and economic advancement slows, absurdist coping mechanisms become a rational psychological response.
- Surreal self-deprecation lets a generation express economic anxiety without directly naming it — a lower-risk emotional outlet.
- The humor is a symptom with a clear economic trigger, not a random cultural mutation.



CULTURAL ANALYSIS

The Giant Cockroach Self-Image

- Young Turkish men depict themselves as giant cockroaches performing ritual ablution, reporting for military service, or facing financial dread.
- Kafka's *Metamorphosis* is recontextualized: transformation into vermin as a metaphor for economic and social irrelevance.
- The joke format is silly. The economic anxiety underneath it is not.



METAPHOR: METAMORPHOSIS, RECONTEXTUALIZED

INSTRUCTOR'S NOTE

Treat the absurdity as the packaging, not the payload. The payload is a real generational balance sheet.

MODEL

Absurdism as a **Low-Cost Outlet**

- Direct economic complaint carries social and sometimes political cost (see Week 12).
- Absurdist self-deprecation carries almost none — it reads as a joke first and a complaint second.
- Rational agents facing a costly outlet and a nearly free one will substitute toward the free one, every time.



COST OF COMPLAINT VS. COST OF JOKE

TAKEAWAY OF THE WEEK

The Joke Is a Pressure Valve

Absurdist self-image is what economic anxiety looks like after it has been priced into the cheapest available outlet.

NEXT WEEK → SADPOSTS, DOOMER AESTHETICS & TOKI ARCHITECTURE