

Porters waiting for
work in yag iskelesi,
istanbul, 1954,
photograph by ara
gler ...

[Design](#), [Photography](#)



Looking at old photographs relit the flame of memories, be it good or bad. If a picture is taken at a time when you did not exist yet, it could either jumpstart curiosity or is perceived as unimportant. Ara Güler's photograph called Porters Waiting for Work in Yag Iskelesi, Istanbul depicts the rise of unemployment rate as the population growth rapidly increases. It served as a reminder, a warning, and an eye-opener.

At first glance, the photo consists of a bunch of men huddled by the sidewalk while waiting for work, as stated by the title. Aside from the color, the old building wall and the cobblestone road suggests that the photo was taken a long time ago. In short, one would be looking at an old photograph of a bunch of men. However, spending more time with it and focusing on minute details brought about new thoughts on the setting and situation when it was taken. The unpolished shoes, the unkempt trousers, and the unshaven faces depicts a time when poverty was a major problem. These men, unable to qualify for a stable and more lucrative job, chose to wait around for heavier work even for a small wage due to desperation. Judging by their number and the way some of them are slumped down to where they are seated, it shows that unemployment has been an issue ever since.

Although there isn't any elaborate facial expression on these men's faces to suggest a dominant emotion throughout the photograph, there are various elements that could make a viewer stop, feel, and formulate a possible story about some of the characters within. The man looking out at the right seems very patient and hopeful that work would soon be available. The way his chest struts outward makes it seem like he is ready to take on work anytime. The man with his face on his hand seems tired, but not tired enough to go

home, so he sneaks in some sleep time while work is scarce.

This photograph serves as a reminder to a time when there was a thick line separating the rich and the slaves. It depicts a time when the rich probably huddled surrounded by a luxurious and intricately designed wall while the unfortunate huddled beside an old, stained concrete wall. It reminded of hard times, poverty, and desperation. As a warning, the picture shows a possible future for people who take their youth for granted. It warns people about what could happen if there was no sufficient education and if opportunities are ignored. The photographed group of porters caught in a moment of waiting can be an eye-opener for people who exist nowadays. People in authoritative positions, be it in the government, organizations, and schools, should realize that slavery is not, and never will be, an option to build a healthy and prosperous community or nation.

What I love about this photograph is that, despite of the beaten, stained, and faded elements, there is a sense of hope emanating from within it. It shows that not having a stable job is not reason enough to quit and to sink into a pool of depression. Even if working as a porter requires strength and utmost determination, there are still those who are willing to do it for the sake of earning money the right and decent way. At first, the photo stirs a sad wave of emotion. However, looking into it further, considering the details, and observing the body language of the figures makes the sadness morph into hope. In spite of the haggard, dirty, and unkempt appearance of the porters, the photograph captures the fire in their hearts which are fuelled by the desire to earn a living in the most righteous way they could. The way Ara Güler bridged various thoughts and emotions through it is tremendously

admirable.

Bread and Gun, Kaleici, Ankara, 1970 Photograph by Ara Güler

Photographs with children are almost always very eye-catching. Children possess that certain character of innocence and pure emotion. Ara Güler's Bread and Gun features children in a somewhat depressing scenario which could almost make you shake your head with disbelief. It is a reflection of what type of role models and examples are being presented to children nowadays.

Walking towards this picture, it immediately reminded me of children who grew up in poverty-stricken places that undergo endless wars. It is from a time when children sleep in encampments, with only blasts or gunshots as lullabies. It is a reminder of how cruel violence can be on children and how unfair it is to make them suffer from it.

The photograph, with the children's piercing eyes looking straight into the lens and probably beyond it, is very disturbing at first glance. The way the little boy holds the gun into his mouth makes one want to grab it away from him. However, the hint of a smile on his face gave an impression that the mere sight of a gun, or any type of ammunition for that matter, is very common where they are. It is very saddening to see that he is too naïve to realize the dangers of pointing a gun into any part of his body. It stirs up anger inside against the adults around them for allowing this little boy to hold a weapon that way.

The girl holding big pieces of bread in her arms looks like she has not eaten a decent meal for quite some time. Looking into her eyes is very heart-breaking. While she looks frail and gentle, the way her body is turned away

from the camera that way makes it look like she has every intention of keeping the bread safe against anyone who might want to take it away from her. The way she holds the bread close to her body shows that she appreciates its importance.

Any photo with a child and a gun, especially one that is taken in real scenarios, often invites anger, hatred, and depression from whoever looks at it. This is no different. It stirred questions like “ Why are children put through this?” or “ Why do there have to be a need for guns anyway?” When these questions pop up, the brain formulates certain theories and reasons to get an answer, in an effort to tame the strong emotions that the heart feels. Ara Güler’s photo not only stirs emotions, it also stirs thoughts, resolutions, and a change in perception. Although there are no literal words talking about the effects of war and violence on children, the photo clearly conveys that message through the eyes.

People who live in Ankara, formerly known as Angora, are very passionate and strict about their traditions. It is a common sight for little boys to be playing around with gun replicas that actually fire. Although people from outside their culture are surprised about how inappropriate it is for a little boy to hold a gun, as depicted in Güler’s photo, locals from Ankara are not bothered at all. For them, learning to hold and shoot a gun at a very young age is a depiction of great masculinity, which is very crucial based on their traditions.

No matter how far back the tradition goes, it is and will always be inappropriate and dangerous for children to hold something that symbolizes war and violence. The little girl who carries the pieces of bread sort of

balances the photo by providing a softer, gentler, and more acceptable image. The photograph weakens the knees each and every time it is looked upon. The photographer has indeed captured a moment of contrasts: innocence and corruption, gentleness and violence, bread and gun.

Works Cited

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