

Ahmet Ögüt  
**Things Based  
on Real-Life  
Events**

01/04

A sunny day in Berlin. In his apartment on Karl-Marx-Straße, Ahmed is searching for his phone to call Ahmed.

The phone is ringing. After a while it is picked up.

– Hi Ahmed! I got your number from Ceyda. Remember she introduced us at the People’s Park? You were swamped with the urgent logistical question of people amassing in front of the Our Commons tent. I hope I am not disturbing you now. Is this a good time to talk?

– Hello my namesake! Yes, I remember, how can I forget! I keep receiving e-mails that are actually for you. Hey look. I am at the Justice Palace at Çağlayan for Festus’s case. It is kind of hectic here now. Can you call me back in a few hours?

– Oh, is that case still going on? Yes, sure. I will call you back. Talk to you soon.

Ahmed finds himself staring out the window. Sunlight washes through the room on an unusually warm spring day. He didn’t get the chance to share his idea with Ahmed. Now he has to wait for a few hours and is feeling slightly nervous about how Ahmed will respond. However, he is soon taken by other thoughts – namely the Festus Okey case. It has been almost seven years since the terrifying incident. Festus Okey was a Nigerian footballer. It was well known that he was shot by the police while being detained in the Beyoğlu police station. What has happened since then? Ahmed decides to find out, and reads some articles providing updates from the court. Obviously, the judiciary system has used its usual tactics – the case has been dragged out. The Supreme Court of Appeals waited four years for Festus Okey’s civil registry extract to be brought from the Nigerian Population Affairs Directorate in order to confirm that the identity of the murdered man matched Okey’s. Then the Supreme Court of Appeals penal chamber asked for confirmation that his brother, who had applied for a motion to intervene, was his real brother. They had to examine the DNA before granting his request accordingly. This is how the years have passed in vain.

A striking thought startles Ahmed – perhaps the idea that he couldn’t tell Ahmed about yet and the drama of Festus have something in common. He feels like in both cases he is actually looking for an answer to the same question that the court is carelessly asking: “What if I am not who I think I am? If this

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is the truth, then why am I only told after being murdered? What if I knew this in advance?"

Getting lost online reading about this unresolved story, Ahmed looks at his hand-wound watch. It has stopped again. He checks the time on his phone in order to set his watch. As he winds it, he can hear the gear train transmitting the force of the mainspring to the balance wheel and adding up the swings to get seconds, minutes, and hours. Its sound makes him remember that he is supposed to meet some of his friends at the opening of a new nonprofit art space near Görlitzer Park – Aydem Azmikara, Ann Lee, Patrick Ireland, Özgür K., Bernardo Soares, Zişan, and Guan Tan. This would be a good opportunity to tell them about his idea before sharing it with Ahmed. He jumps on his bike and arrives at the opening in no time. Before checking the exhibition, he starts telling them about his idea. Patrick responds:

I have never been who I was told I am. Ahmed, you know Brian, right? Brian O'Doherty? He's always insisted that I am his alter ego. You know that I was once buried in a shallow plot in the scenic gardens of the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin.

Aydem comments, "Ha ha! I've never been myself, but rather everyone else. Do you know how it feels to be a distributed identity?"

Ann Lee adds, "Nobody knew who I was before my rights were sold to Pierre and Philippe."

Özgür K. jumps into the conversation with his usual friendly but controversial voice: "This is why I don't have any name, you are the ones who keep calling me by this name!" Bernardo soothes the tension in the air with his gentle voice: "Doesn't feel special being one of the seventy heteronyms of Fernando." Zişan interferes:

I am the oldest one among you all; an adopted orphan, a queer Ottoman woman, a channeled spirit. I am not replacing anyone, instead I was asked to exist in collaboration. That is why I cannot think of any better title for my autobiography than this one: *Every Name in History is I and I is Other*.

As the conversation continues, Ahmed realizes that he has been rediscovering his friends. On his way back home he feels more confident in his idea – at least all of his friends were enthusiastic about it. Guan Tan's words are still lingering in his mind, "Just like me, you are neither you nor him, but the combination of both of you; you are the combination of the many."

A few hours later, Ahmed gets back home with a bit of headache from the cheap wine he had at the opening.

Impatiently he picks up the phone and calls Ahmed again.

– Ahmed, Hi! It is me again, Ahmed. Is this now a good time to talk?

– Hey Ahmed, yes, now I am back home after another long day at the courthouse. As you know many of our friends are still in custody since the People's Park revolt. I need to come here almost every day.

Upon hearing Ahmed's briefing of the day, Ahmed stands speechless for a while, lacking words for a response. On the other hand, he feels that this is finally the moment to explain his idea.

– Yes, Ahmed, since the People's Park, things are not the same. I wanted to get in touch with you to share an idea. I just got invited to participate in the next Ecumenopolis Biennial. I didn't feel comfortable taking part in it as an artist this time, especially after the People's Park, but saying simply "No" also felt irresponsible. I participated in the Ecumenopolis Biennial twice in the past, but this time, especially after the People's Park, I really have to think about my role carefully. Is it possible to take another stand? Ecumenopolis is my city, it is the city I love. I feel an urgent need to do something collectively. Deep in thought, I remembered you, my dear namesake. Having the same full name gives us a precious anonymity, a confusing one, which may bear an immense potential. We can use this confusion as a productive tool and create an anonymous Ahmed Basonry, of which no one can tell the difference. They will try and give up and focus rather on what is done. I wouldn't ask you to do anything extra, like an artwork or that sort of thing. We would just angle and shift the attention of the public at the biennial to what you and your friends have been already doing everyday. You are already constantly involved in collective actions and campaigns. We would transform the confusion into something productive. What do you think? Would you participate in the Ecumenopolis Biennial instead of me?

– Ahmed, I have been thinking about what we have in common, our names, yes. I

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mean, I've received a lot of e-mails that are addressed to you, exhibition invitations, symposium invitations, residency invitations, etc. At first I was trying to correct them, but at some point I stopped forwarding them to you. I liked the idea of confusion. But I am not sure how this would work. Could you give me forty-eight hours to decide? I would like to discuss this with some friends, and then I'll get back to you.

– I hope we can really take this ironic connection between us to a constructive and collaborative level. I wish I was in Ecumenopolis now; it would have been much easier to meet up in person and explain what I have been contemplating. I will be waiting to hear from you... Take good care of yourself.

– You too Ahmed. Take care.

They hang up. Ahmed feels that for the next two days, time is almost standing still. He is very curious about what Ahmed is thinking through. Who are these people that he wants to refer to? Is Murray Bookchin one of them? Will he talk to Suphi Nejat Ağırnaslı or Shaimaa el-Sabbagh? Or Wendy Schlesinger? Who else would he talk to, besides his friends from ecologist circles, feminist and transgender groups, the anticapitalists and migrants' solidarity networks that formed the group Our Commons – a united ground of action for neighborhoods threatened with eviction and urban movements? Ahmed finds their statement, titled "What We See," on their website. It reminds him of his friend Bernardo's words, "Life is what we make of it. Travel is the traveler. What we see isn't what we see but what we are." After a moment of thinking, he continues reading the statement:

Clouds gathering north and south. Public spaces, street corners, poor neighborhoods shouting out loud for true democracy. From Tahrir to Sintagma, crowds are urging us all to see: see the inequalities of a system in total crisis, of the dirty games of technocrats and parliamentarians, of insecure dictators and false democrats.

He continues reading the statement. "What we hear. Where we begin." Lost in his thoughts, he falls asleep.

The next day he wakes up to news he doesn't want to believe: an explosion at a coal mine in Soma triggered an underground fire. According to the news reports more than 300

people were killed in the disaster, marking it as one of the worst of its kind in recent history.

Ahmed thinks of numbers and disasters: 1,099 in Courrières, 362 in Monongah, 259 in Cherry, 439 in Senghenydd, 1,549 in Benxi, 437 in Coalbrook, 682 in Datong, 458 at Mitsui Miike, 426 at Wankie, 268 in the village of Stava, 300 in Nambija, and now 300 in Soma.

Thinking of all these people, he spends his day taking a long walk.

He can't wait to hear back from Ahmed. Would he say yes?

Finally the phone rings just before midnight. Ahmed, in a nervous voice:

– Hi Ahmed, how were your last two days? I woke up to the shocking news of the Soma mine disaster.

– Hi Ahmed, yes, we are all in shock! Some of our friends are already on the bus to Soma. Tension is high there as hundreds of relatives are jostling outside the mine's entrance waiting for news. There is a heavy police presence.

– Ahmed, while these things are happening, I feel uncomfortable taking your time. Did you have a chance to think about my proposal to participate in the Ecumenopolis Biennial instead of me?

– Ahmed, yes, I talked to my friends. Even though I like the idea of creating confusion and working together, I don't feel comfortable including my own name. In the end I decided to turn it down. I am sorry to tell you this, but believe me; I really did consider how it could have been made possible. As you may know, I make films and documentaries as well and I always had this dilemma. Up until now I have never signed anything with my name. And I don't want to change this principle. Even though people may think it's you and not me, I still don't feel comfortable with the idea.

This response upsets Ahmed deeply. Maybe he is too naive to think there are no distinctions between art, life, and politics. He tries his best to continue the conversation:

– Although this is very sad news for me, I respect your decision. I know we have something more in common than carrying the same name, and hopefully we will discover what this exactly is over the years.

I'll let you know when I am in Ecumenopolis next time. Until then, take care Ahmed.

As soon as they hang up, Ahmed receives a phone call:

– Hi Ahmed, sorry to disturb you. We e-mailed you a few times but haven't heard back. We wonder if you would be interested in participating in the ... ?

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