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BRINGING OUT THE "CAL" IN GLOCAL: SITUATING SUBCULTURE AND DIGITAL SUBCULTURES IN TURKISH YOUTH

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Abstract: In a globalized postmodern world, the metanarratives of modernity are contested and have been paving the way for a patchwork of cultures and subcultures. In this overarching context, subcultures represent values, norms and practices divergent, at the fringes of, or alternative to the dominant cultures, and thus are crucial to map the "cal" in glocal in a globalized world. In efforts to "make sense" of a postmodern glocal world, I argue that mapping the missing kaleidoscope of "cals" around the world is important more than ever. I examine in this article the youth subcultures specifically in the context of Turkey and discuss the potential of Turkish youth to form subcultures within the framework of the internet, and digital or "net subcultures". To this end, the first part of the present study unpacks the concepts of "subculture", "youth subculture" and digital "net subcultures" from a theoretical perspective. Next, I discuss why Turkish youth have been unable to form subcultural emergences throughout various historical periods. In the final section, I analyse whether technological innovations such as the internet, which allow for immediate access to different cultural forms, offer Turkish youth the possibility of creating nascent subcultures, and drawing from the particular contexts of the Gezi Protests in 2013 and the "Youth and Social Media Research" published that same year.

Keywords: Gezi protests, net subculture, digital subculture, Turkish youth, communication.

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INTRODUCTION

Subcultures that differ from the dominant culture and oppose the hegemonic one include symbolic forms of resistance, such as music and styles of dress that diverge from the mainstream. Subcultures, particularly those made up of youth, workers, and Black British Cultural Studies became prominent in the works of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (Cccs) from the mid-1960s onwards in the West. The Cccs, which focused on how subcultural groups and individuals resisting dominant forms of culture and identity create their own styles and identities, conducted extensive studies on youth. In this paper, I argue that subcultures and digital subcultures in particular, are crucial to map the "cal" in glocal in a globalized world. As the metanarratives of modernity have been contested and patchworks of cultures and subcultures are in emergence in the current moment in the 21st century, to "make sense" of a postmodern glocal world, mapping the missing kaleidoscope of "cals" around the world is important more than ever.

I examine in this article the youth subcultures specifically in the context of Turkey and discuss the potential of Turkish youth to form subcultures within the framework of the internet, and digital or "net subcultures". While the subculture concept is frequently encountered in Western communication literature, it is scarcely discussed in Turkey's communication scholarship. In fact, research conducted on this topic in Turkey argues that there is no autonomous youth culture in the country, claiming that Turkish youth have not been able to create their own culture and, therefore, have not formed a youth subculture. Today, with the spread of the internet, subcultures and digital subcultures in Western societies, where young people have been able to produce cultures distinct from the dominant one and thus form a separate "subculture" group from the broader society, are now examined under the heading of "net subcultures".

The first part of the present study unpacks the concepts of "subculture", "youth subculture", and digital "net subcultures" from a theoretical perspective. Next, I discuss why Turkish youth

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SUBCULTURE AND YOUTH AS A SUBCULTURE

Subcultures, which encompass actions, behaviours, and values that differ from dominant normative forms, represent forms of cultural expression that demonstrate cultural pluralism. The purpose of subcultural analyses is to unpack the departures and contradictions between the practices of a particular group and general practices, and the ways in which these contradictions are produced. Subcultural studies aim to map out the social world, thereby working toward the representation of society. In this sense, subcultures are cultural forms that oppose mainstream politics and media, as well as societal norms and traditions. Subcultural groups exist outside of mainstream society, and their unconventional actions are often aimed at changing the world. Subcultures, which resist the norms imposed by media and consumer culture, are often made up of workers, youth, and marginalized groups (Laughey 2010: 125).

In his 1979 book, Dick Hebdige noted that young people use their styles as a form of expression to intervene in the social world of cultural signs. In other words, subcultures represent alternative cultures and practices to the dominant culture of a given society. This process, which may begin with an act of defiance against the extant dominant orders, can evolve into a stylistic form of resistance or contempt through the use of objects like sharply combed hair, a small motorcycle, records, or clothing styles. A smile or a sarcastic grin here references a rejection of the existing order (Kabaş 2012: 1).

Subcultures, organized in small groups and in opposition to the culture they emerge from, tend to have a politically rebellious

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and activist stance. Hebdige describes subcultures as a form of "noise" against dominant media messages. He is aware that the messages of counterculture cannot replace dominant media representations. In fact, alternative subcultures seek to attract the attention of the media, and by doing so, they aim to transform the dominant codes[1]. In fact, the concept of subculture was in use before Dick Hebdige's work. As a term, subculture was first used by McLung Lee in 1945 and later defined by Gordon in 1947 as "a subdivision within a national culture, which can be distinguished by elements such as class, ethnicity, region, rural or urban residence, and religious beliefs". Over time, the concept came to encompass potential avenues of liberation, including ideas of identity and difference. However, it was from the mid-1960s onward that the concept saw significant development. With the approach of the Cccs and Dick Hebdige's work, perspectives on youth cultures and styles became subjects of debate (Jenks 2007: 23, 32).

According to Phil Cohen, who studied youth subcultures, the latent function of youth subcultures is "to express and resolve the contradictions of parent culture (dominant culture)". In other words, youth subcultures, through consumption, contest the cultural puritanism of the working class while exposing the allure of the hedonism produced by consumerism. Thus, punks, skinheads, and other subcultural groups bring back elements no longer visible in parent culture and integrate them with selected features from other classes. Through their cultural consumption, youth subcultures benefit from the privileges of the dominant consumer society, while also reacting to the disappearance of working-class culture (Storey 2000: 141). John Clarke, like Hebdige, examines youth subcultures within the context of dominant culture, but he incorporates Gramsci's concept of hegemony to frame youth subcultures as part of class struggle. Hebdige, however, argues that the struggle between subcultures and the dominant class is fought not directly through subcultures themselves, but through the politics of style. Indeed, groups like the Teddy Boys, mods, or punks constantly engage in a symbolic battle against dominant culture through their clothing, consumption patterns, behaviour, and musical preferences.

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Yet Hebdige also notes that the cultural styles and symbolic struggles created by youth can be co-opted by the culture industry. For him, style is not a marker of class and class struggle, but a way to express cultural identity. Youth subcultures, through style, distinguish themselves and demonstrate their differences from the dominant culture. When this resistance to the passive commercial tastes of dominant culture turns into conformity, youth subcultures may seek a new point of resistance (Storey 2000: 144). In summary, within cultural studies, the youth is seen as an active producer of cultural products.

Studies on youth in the West indicate that youth is a product of modernity. As a social category born out of modernity, youth represented the future of countries both during the formation of nation-states and within the ideologies of nationalism (Lüküslü 2014: 22). In contemporary capitalist societies, childhood and youth have been viewed by industry as periods for the consumption of goods and services. Additionally, youth has been associated with renewal, honesty, and a critical stance against injustice. Today, while adults uphold the old values of an institution, youth symbolize dissent. In this regard, industry, through mechanized production, has displaced the notions of experience, education and skill, pushing the elderly out of factories and elevating the endurance and responsiveness of youth (Ewen 1976: 139-143).

However, from the late 1960s onwards, a heterogeneous era of tastes emerged, which adults referred to as youth culture. In this period, youth exhibited characteristics such as comfort in clothing, rejection of traditional art forms and high cultures, advocacy of radical values, and incorporation of elements from Black and folk cultures. Youth culture during this time also engaged with social issues such as opposition to war and inequality. Indeed, this new youth, distinguished by its clothing and lifestyle choices, challenged American social values. Criticizing consumer ethics and middle-class morality, this youth culture was praised in Time magazine for being peaceful and honest (Gans 2012: 128-132).

More recently, Ayhan Kaya, in his article *A Critical Pedagogy Through Rap: German-Turkish Hip-Hop Youth*, examines hip-hop

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as a youth culture that both integrates young people into global youth culture and creates a solidarity network to confront issues produced by modernity, such as capitalism, racism, and exclusion. Hip-hop culture and similar youth subcultures, which share common interests and solidarity networks, provide young people with a space for engaging in what Beck calls "sub-politics"[2] and Giddens refers to as "life politics"[3]. This offers youth a political style that frees them from unjust barriers imposed by tradition, parental pressure, and material deprivation. In this context, hip-hop communities address issues like discrimination, exclusion, xenophobia, and inequality through their song lyrics and graffiti (Kaya 2012: 467).

NET (DIGITAL) SUBCULTURES

The subcultures that Hebdige experienced and addressed as a problem in his book emerged at the beginning of the 20th century when close face-to-face relationships were prevalent. However, today, new subcultures have evolved through new digital communication technologies and the internet. In the article *Internet Subcultures and Oppositional Politics*, co-authored with Richard Kahn, Douglas Kellner discusses "net subcultures". These new subcultures or net subcultures formed through the internet focus on information flow and aim to go beyond the knowledge and cultural flows provided by the dominant system. For this reason, net subcultures are focused on the revolutionary democratization of information and culture.

These subcultures aim to enable individuals to freely express themselves through alternative cultural forms, experiences, and activities. A key point here is that net subcultures allow for the creation of non-mainstream identities and communication practices. Much like the hypertext nature of the web itself, the identities of internet subcultures are hybrid and complex, which leads them to form close connections and organize with other subcultural groups on the internet. In this sense, many internet subcultures dissolve seemingly rigid ideological and cultural ties in "net" life. Douglas Kellner cites the

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"BBS" (Bulletin Board Systems)[4] in the 1980s and "The Well"[5] in the 1990s as early examples of internet subcultures in America. Despite the commercial influence on the internet, Kellner notes that non-monopolistic subcultures have also emerged, with these groups creating discussion topics and sharing files and information across various platforms[6].

Indeed, the increasing trend of leisure activities becoming home-centred has shifted entertainment from outdoor venues to indoor settings. Alongside television, audio and visual reproduction equipment, telecommunications, and computer technologies have been integrated into our daily lives. Among these tools, the internet stands out as an interactive medium that allows for real-time or delayed discussions. The internet is a multimedia tool that facilitates the dissemination of images, sounds, videos, and other cultural forms. Moreover, through the use of computer and information technologies, it holds the potential to open new avenues for the political struggles of voices and groups marginalized by mainstream media, thereby enhancing democratization. Internet culture, compared to previous media forms, has fostered a more fragmented, diverse, and interactive culture. Today's youth, better educated and equipped with more technological tools than in the past, is accustomed to knowing, recognizing, and gaining experiences electronically. In everyday life, they see television, radio, and computers as part of their home environment, often considering them their closest companions. This phenomenon has led to the emergence of a new generation, referred to as the "net generation", which is deeply integrated with computer-based living.

While radio and television remain primary media channels for young people, the internet is increasingly drawing more youth into its fold. In his article *Contemporary Youth and Postmodern Adventure*, co-authored with Steven Best, Douglas Kellner discusses how youth in America have used the internet to challenge existing politics and form a subculture. Due to the transformative nature of the internet and multimedia computer technologies, which reshape cultural forms, information, and images, young people have acquired new technological skills. This development has allowed

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them to use the internet as a communication tool distinct from mainstream media and to form youth subcultures. Kellner points out that the internet enables young people to create their own websites, making it easier to discuss public issues. However, he also cautions that the internet harbors both "stupidity" and "banality", as well as monopolistic and commercial interests. Nevertheless, as Best and Kellner aim to demonstrate, the internet offers individuals, and particularly youth subcultures, a platform not only for entertainment and passive consumption but also for creating their own communities and identities and for realizing positive cultural and political projects[7].

Subcultures play a significant role in the emergence of new social relationships and political forms. The internet serves as a crucial platform for these oppositional cultures and alternative voices to be heard. Youth subcultures, such as punk, goth, or hip-hop, define themselves in opposition to the dominant culture. These subcultures encompass clothing, styles, lifestyles, and life practices, ranging from narcissistic and apolitical stances to anarchist and punk cultures, activist environmental movements, animal rights groups, and vegetarian communities. Online youth subcultures extend from videos, music, and multimedia texts to political information and organizing potential. For instance, during the 1999 anti-globalization protests in Seattle, young people used the internet for exchanging information, engaging in discussions, organizing oppositional movements, and proposing alternative forms of politics. Such activities require a certain level of computer literacy. As mainstream media culture increasingly excludes young people, computer culture opens up spaces for them to communicate through discussion groups, create their own websites, and generate diverse political projects[8].

SUBCULTURE, THE INTERNET AND YOUTH IN TURKEY

In her book *Türkiye'de Gençlik Miti* ("The Myth of Youth in Turkey"), which examines Turkish youth as a political category,

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Demet Lüküslü argues that youth in Turkey, from the Tanzimat period to the 1990s, has been a key political actor. According to Lüküslü, during the Tanzimat era, young people, especially graduates of modern schools, were expected to lead the country's renewal. The *Jön Türkler* ("Young Turks") of this period internalized this role and sought ways to save the empire. This youth myth, constructed in the late Ottoman Empire, continued during the early years of the Republic. Youth was politically defined and became the symbol of the Republic. Between 1923 and 1950, youth in Turkey played a role deeply intertwined with politics, and by the 1970s, youth representing different ideologies were united in their desire to "save the country". Up until the 1980s, youth fulfilled this political mission, becoming a recognized political category in society. However, after 1980, Turkey encountered a more apolitical youth (Lüküslü 2014: 16-17).

Since the late 1950s in the West and the 1960s in Turkey, the trend of independent youth movements has been political. According to some authors, this situation is another reason why youth has not been able to form a subculture. During this period, young people have sought to become adults with a voice rather than forming a subcultural group under the conditions of the time (Belge 1983: 365). This situation persisted until the 1980s. In a period when wealth became the primary measure of social status, after the military coup of September 12, 1980, which eradicated social opposition and saw the political power supporting the private sector, the only ideal for politically indifferent youth was to become wealthy. Indeed, the mindset of the youth during this period was not occupied with the views of critics of the established order like Marx and Engels, as it had been before 1980. The goals of the youth of this period were more focused on learning English and computing skills, securing employment in the private sector after university, and becoming successful businesspeople (Bali 2001-2002: 206-207). Research conducted on youth in the 1980s shows that they were significantly influenced by the lifestyles portrayed in advertisements, series, and films on television, and longed for such a life (Bali

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2002: 31). This situation did not change in the 1990s. Research conducted during these years revealed that youth were

> business-minded, technocratic, competitive, and conservative. They never consider sacrificing themselves for an idea or belief. They are interested in computers, want to learn languages, and are open to the world [...]. They want to marry a good partner, live in a good house, and drive a good car (quoted in Bali 2002: 53, 58).

Research indicates that the apolitical attitudes of youth continued into the 2000s. The results of the 2004 Youth Values Survey conducted by Istanbul Bilgi University also reveal that there was no change in this situation. According to the findings, the majority of young people lean towards the centre-right and right-wing, and the youth, who do not wish to be actively involved in politics, remain distant from political interests in the 2000s, just as they did in the 1990s (for detailed information see Kazgan, 2007: 145).

As shown in the analyses of youth above, young people in Turkey have not been able to form a subculture in terms of self-expression and creating their own culture and style. However, when looking at the Turkish youths' potential for forming a clear subculture, the situation appears more promising. During the Gezi Park events, which were perceived as an intervention into the society's lifestyle, young people utilized the internet as a subcultural platform and employed it for "information exchange, discussions, organizing opposition movements, and proposing alternative forms of politics". In the same year as the Gezi Park Events, the *Youth and Social Media Research Report* conducted with young people provides hope that the youth may have the potential to create a "clear subculture".

The *Youth and Social Media Research Report* published in 2013, conducted by Ipsos, is a quantitative online study aimed at measuring the attitudes and behaviours of young people aged 15-29 towards social media. The study, conducted after the Gezi Events, found that 86% of young people use social media at least once a day, and 72% use it twice a day. This result indicates a close relationship between young people and social media. A significant

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finding of the study in relation to our research issue is that 56% of young people view social media as a platform with the power to mobilize masses. In other words, young people see social media as a "societal/political platform". Another striking result of the research is that the most important issue for young people on social media is "freedom" (37%). This is followed by reliability (34%), honesty (32%), and sharing (30%) (Youth and Social Media Research Report, 2013: 17-18).

Based on young people's attitudes towards social media, a total of five "youth subgroups" have emerged: *a*) male rationalists (16.4%); *b*) female rationalists (24.0%); *c*) activists (20.2%); *d*) identifiers (9.5%); *e*) sceptics (16.9%). In this study, activists are considered representatives of the youth subculture group on the internet. According to the report, social media represents "freedom" to activists more than to other subgroups. This group exhibits a strong stance, particularly in areas related to political/social agendas and the power of social media. For instance, their level of agreement with statements about social media serving as a tool for individual and collective memory, being used for provocation, and the understanding of its power by public officials is higher compared to young people in other subgroups. These young individuals, who freely criticize those they follow, perceive social media as a platform for social opposition. Like the general trend, Activists most frequently discuss current events and issues, as well as music, films, and TV shows, but they have a higher tendency to discuss and comment on "social issues and events" on social media. The gender and age distribution of activists is similar to that of other subgroups, but it is the group with the highest proportion of higher education graduates. Among activists, the rate of connecting to social media via smartphones is higher; they spend an average of 1-6 hours on social media daily, connecting multiple times per day (Youth and Social Media Research Report 2013: 16-19).

According to the research results, media for approximately half of the youth means leisure time (54%), communication (53%), following/creating agendas (51%), and education/research (47%). In short, young people primarily use social media for entertainment

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(60%) and obtaining/providing information (59%). It can be inferred from this that social media is not only a tool for entertainment but also serves as an alternative to traditional media for young people.

OUTLOOK AND CONCLUSIONS

In his book *From History to Contemporary Times*, Murat Belge states that, unlike Western youth, who have developed a distinct subculture by both producing and consuming their own culture, no autonomous youth culture has emerged in Turkey. Indeed, while youth movements and fashions in the West have developed from the bottom up and manifested as youth rebellion, in Turkey these fashions have been merely followed. Our most stylish were those who anticipated new trends in advance, yet even the most alert among us did not understand what these trends represented (Belge 1983: 369).

> Every bourgeois or petty-bourgeois youth in Turkey acquired a pair of jeans when they came of age. While American youth were aware that they were dressing like workers or laborers, we were only aware that we were dressing like Americans […]. At that time, our elites in Ankara felt happy if they could purchase as many of the items sold by returning American soldiers as possible (Belge 1983: 369).

Consequently, rather than creating their own culture, Turkish youth have attempted to appropriate trends, music, culture, lifestyles, and advertisements made for other cultures and ways of life. Belge attributes this situation to the lack of freedom of expression and action granted to youth in the traditional Turkish society. According to Belge, young people who have not been granted democratic rights have had to pursue their desires in a "subversive" manner. Acting subversively essentially means adopting the rules even when one is outside them, which impedes maturation. "Most young people in Turkey indulge in escapist behaviour for their daily needs and life

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impulses, but they do not genuinely question the values presented to them" (Belge 1983: 365).

The *Youth and Social Media Research Report* published by the Ministry of Youth and Sports in 2013, based on a study conducted by Ipsos Social Research Institute in 2012, provides optimism that young people may create a subcultural space for themselves on the internet. In line with this conclusion, it is worth noting that during the 2013 Gezi Park protests, Turkish youth actively used the internet to both publicize and spread information about these events. Unable to tolerate the traditional media's disregard of the events in central Istanbul, youth utilized the internet, particularly Twitter, as an alternative media platform to inform the public and advocate for their cause. They critically and ironically discussed traditional media on the internet. The youth, labelled as "protesters" rather than subculturists, created their own culture and style in Gezi Park with their tents, libraries, clinics, workshops, mosque, and a cinema screen for film screenings, and established their own internet TV channels. In doing so, they managed to act not in a subversive manner but in the way they intended.

We have transitioned from the industrial capitalism era theorized by Marx and the monopolistic capitalism critiqued by the Frankfurt School in the 1930s to an era of "technocapitalism" where capital, technology, information, and entertainment industries coexist. In this technocapitalist era, technology is becoming increasingly significant not only for everyone but also for youth. According to the *Youth and Sports Ministry's Youth and Social Media Report*, it is observed that young people in Turkey have started to use technology, or more precisely, new communication technologies, as a tool for opposition to the existing system. In this sense, we are hopeful because we have moved from the apolitical, system-conforming Turkish youth described in academic research to a generation that uses the internet as a subcultural space in Gezi, "resisting" and "unwilling to be washed away".

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NOTES

[1] http://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/essays/internetsubculturesoppositionalpolitics.pdf.

[2] According to Beck, sub-politics can be considered a categorical transformation of politics that leads from traditional state and political party activities to other social and collective factors, such as professional organizations and citizen initiatives, allowing individuals to make their voices heard (Akdoğan 2014: 32).

[3] According to Giddens, life politics is a form of lifestyle politics that emphasizes the connection between the local and the global. Giddens explains that while global influences exist in the individual's self-development, the individual's formation also affects global strategies. In other words, life politics links the individual's life with global issues in a mutually interconnected way (Akdoğan 2014: 32).

[4] Bulletin Board System (BBS): A computer or application used to share or exchange messages or files over a network. BBS is the electronic version of bulletin boards commonly found in kitchens or workplaces. It was a type of online community used before the World Wide Web, particularly in the 1980s and early 1990s: http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/bulletin-board-system-BBS.

[5] The Well, The Whole Earth Lectronic Link: One of the oldest virtual communities in the world, which began in 1985 and is particularly known for its internet forums: http://www.well.com.

[6] http://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/essays/internetsubculturesoppositionalpolitics.pdf.

[7] http://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/essays/youthpostmodernadventure.pdf.

[8] http://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/essays/youthpostmodernadventure.pdf.

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