

ALTERNATIVE YOUTH IDENTITIES IN IZMIR
POPULAR CULTURE AND EVERYDAY PRACTICES



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AUGUST 2018

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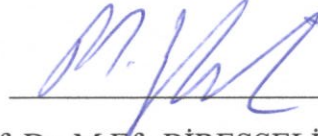
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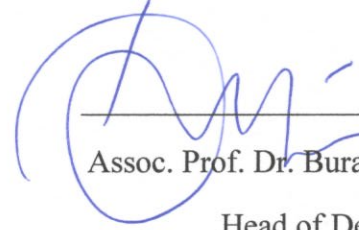
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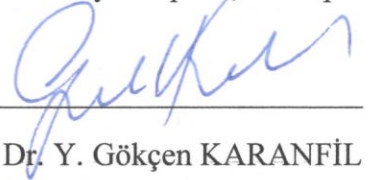
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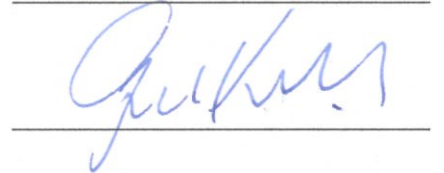
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ABSTRACT

ALTERNATIVE YOUTH IDENTITIES IN IZMIR POPULAR CULTURE AND EVERYDAY PRACTICES

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MA, Media and Communication Studies

Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Gökçen Karanfil

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This thesis examines ‘alternative’ youth cultural identities in Izmir and their meaning making processes by focusing on their own narratives and everyday life experiences. The study favours from qualitative research methods which offer themselves as more suitable research approaches due to the ways in which they make it possible to collect detailed data concerning daily practices, cultural meanings and identity formations. As data gathering techniques, participant observation, semi structured interviews with youth groups and in-depth interviews with the owners and workers of the places where members of ‘alternative’ youth hang out are used. The analytical framework of this study is built around a broad range of theories including popular culture and mass culture debates, cultural theory, youth subculture and post subculture theories. The field study, which is conducted in Alsancak suburb of Izmir over a period of three months, is than positioned within this theoretical background. This thesis works towards mapping out a general framework to discuss the prevailing themes among the everyday practices of alternative youth in Izmir with the expectation that this will pave the way for further research both in Izmir and in Turkey with regards to the everyday lives of these young individuals.

Keywords: Alternative youth, youth identities, subculture, popular culture, Izmir, Turkey

ÖZET

İZMİR'DEKİ ALTERNATİF GENÇLİK KİMLİKLERİ POPÜLER KÜLTÜR VE GÜNDELİK PRATİKLER

Türe Şahin Başkır

MA, Medya ve İletişim Çalışmaları

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Bu çalışma, İzmir'de kendilerini 'ana akım'a karşı 'alternatif' olarak tanımlayan genç bireyler tarafından inşa edilen günümüz gençlik kültürel kimliklerini ve kültürel değerlerini anlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Tez boyunca, gençlik kimliğinin ve kültürel anlamlarının nasıl ve hangi koşullarda inşa edildiğinin araştırılması amaçlandığı için gündelik pratikler, kültürel anlamlar ve kimlik oluşumları ile ilgili ayrıntılı verilerin toplanmasını mümkün kılan nitel araştırma yöntemleri kullanılmıştır. Nitel araştırma yöntemleri içinde ise katılımcı gözlem, gençlik gruplarıyla yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler ve 'alternatif' gençlerin sıklıkla görünür oldukları yerlerin sahipleri ve çalışanları ile derinlemesine görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Çalışmanın analitik çerçevesi popüler kültür ve kitle kültürü teorileri, kültürel teori, gençlik alt kültür ve post alt kültür teorileri gibi geniş bir yelpazeye yayılan kuramsal tartışmalardan beslenerek oluşturmuştur. İzmir'in Alsancak semtinde gerçekleştirilen ve üç aylık bir süreye yayılan alan çalışmasından toplanan bulgular da bu analitik çerçeve içerisinde değerlendirilmiştir. Tezin alan çalışması verilerinin büyük bir kısmı, 'alternatif' gençlerin odak grup görüşmelerinde vurgu yaptıkları konulara dayanarak oluşturulan temalar üzerinden tartışılmıştır. Genç bireylerin kendi ifadelerinden ortaya çıkan bu temalar üzerinden bir tartışma yürütmenin Türkiye'deki kısıtlı gençlik kültürü literatürüne katkı sağlaması ve yapılacak olan gelecek çalışmalara yol açması hedeflenmiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Alternatif gençlik, gençlik kimlikleri, altkültür, popüler kültür, İzmir, Türkiye

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This thesis has been long in the making. My journey started in the Middle East Technical University and ended up in Izmir University of Economics with lots of challenging nevertheless intriguing experiences. Looking back in time, I feel lucky that every step of this thesis has opened new horizons for me and has deepened my intellectual accumulation. I would like to express my gratitude to people who, one way or another, have had a place in this process.

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A NOTE ON INTERVIEWS

All the interviews in this study were carried out in Turkish. The quotes used from these interviews have been translated into English by myself. At the start of each interview the aims and format of the interviews have been verbally explained in detail to the participants. The participants have been informed that they had the right to end their participation at any time or they could stop the recording device when they did not feel comfortable. Throughout the thesis, all participants' names, and any other factors that may identify them, have been kept confidential. In this vein, at the end of each indented quote, a pseudonym and the age of the respondent has been provided in parentheses. Any information from interviews that may give away the identities of the respondents has been intentionally excluded.

A NOTE ON IMAGES

In order to better visualise my fieldwork observations, in the third chapter of the thesis I have opted to use images representing the daily lives of my participants. Some of these photos were shot by myself during my field research while some have been acquired from official websites and social media channels of events and establishments. I have marked the former with the symbol * within the chapter. I have used the latter with the courtesy of the establishments and organizations.

PROLOGUE

As David Morley suggests, “all theory has its roots, in one way or another, in autobiography” (2000: 1). Without intruding into the narratives of the primary subjects of this study (young people of Izmir who feel a part of alternative subcultures), I think it meaningful to start this thesis with a snippet from my own experience as a young woman growing up in Turkey.

I still remember feeling the gaze of other people and sensing their disapproval towards my style while I was strolling the streets in my hometown as a high school student. I have vivid memories of my family members making explanations to their acquaintances about me, stating that my personality was in a state of flux due to my age and that my ‘awkwardness’ would pass as I grew up. I was aware that my ‘different’ style and mostly inappropriate opinions annoyed them. Although it was emphasized that I had to stand out from the crowd, the paths that I could take - which were believed to guarantee a happy and comfortable life - were always predetermined for me. Amongst all these decisions made on my behalf, I do not remember anybody ever asking me about my own interests, my style, how I made sense of things around me and the world at large.

More than a decade has passed since my days in high school; I still feel comfortable expressing myself through different styles and feel that I am not a part of the majority. I have long been deeply intrigued with the question why some people are more prone to be a part of a subculture, adopt different styles and create meanings against the majority, while others feel much more at home within the mainstream society. Looking back over the past year or so, a time mostly spent working on my thesis, I can clearly see now that vignettes from my youth I have mentioned above have been a very important determinant for making this topic so inspiring for me. I know now that when starting this research, I hoped a journey through which I would try and understand the subjects of my research, would also help me better understand myself. I wanted to see through the eyes of these young people and to walk in their shoes to understand what kinds of meanings they created, cultural practices they favoured, and how they experienced living among the ‘majority/mainstream’ in Izmir while being a part of an ‘alternative’ youth culture in Turkey.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study aims at understanding the emerging cultural meanings manifested by youth that defines itself as ‘alternative’ to ‘mainstream’ in Izmir, Turkey. I intend to explore the formation of youth subculture as a new tendency in popular culture and investigate the ways in which youth identities are constructed in contemporary Izmir. I observe a paradoxical relationship between popular culture and the emerging youth subculture groups. While on the one hand, popular culture and dissemination of mainstream media messages constitute a positive driving force for the birth and growth of youth subculture groups, on the other hand, their ‘distinctness’ or ‘alternative’ nature is incorporated and embedded into popular culture via the very same dissemination of media messages. In this research, it is my contention that contemporary youth cultures cannot be fully comprehended unless their activities and cultural practices are studied from the lens of an intersection of different theories through multilayered readings. Hence, throughout the thesis, I draw on a wide range of debates from subculture, post-subculture, postmodern identity, and popular culture theories. I argue, it is possible to encounter postmodern elements in the processes of identity construction among youth subculture groups and see how their cultural practices inevitably find their meanings and articulations within the confines of culture industries.

I begin this research by accepting that subculture as a concept has its limitations in the sense that strict conceptual boundaries and labelling a group with clear cut features are no longer possible nor meaningful due to the rapid global and local changes in socioeconomic, political and cultural aspects of life. Accordingly, I deliberately choose to adopt the terminology of ‘alternative’ youth in my research because this concept ensures a more general and inclusive framework that can gather contemporary youth cultures under the same roof. Furthermore, ‘alternative youth’ stood out as a terminology used by the participants of this study. Hence, by adopting this term I will be allowing the voices of my participants into this thesis. Rather than imposing on them my own labels. I could, on a similar note, call this new contemporary subculture as ‘marginal’ or ‘third new wave,’ but I have refrained from doing this as the former has discriminatory connotations, particularly in the Turkish context, and the latter might encapsulate the research solely within

the confines of music based youth movements ('Third new wave' refers to a new alternative Turkish music genre, inspired by literary movements in Turkey). What I search for is groups which embrace an 'alternative life style' and demonstrate this alternative stance with their 'style' and common thinking habits and actions.

1.1 Aims, Objectives and Research Questions

I believe that since contemporary youth cultures have complicated and dynamic structures and that they are characterized by more complex stratifications, postmodern approaches in youth analysis provide an opportunity for more creative interpretations and the fostering of a deeper discussion in a flexible platform. Therefore, in order to understand the formation and evolution of subculture identities, one must transcend structural determinants, such as class, race, ethnicity, gender, etc. (without fully abandoning them), and focus on the micro cosmos of everyday life practices such as consumption habits, leisure activities, the internet use, various forms of socialisation, family relations, engagements with social media etc. Proliferation of popular culture messages allow for mixed styles, new combinations, genres and move beyond the traditional understanding of subculture groups with their blurred, reflexive, fluid group identities. My point of departure than, is that there are complex, hybrid and authentic cultural fragmentations and new combinations in contemporary subcultures that enable the formation of new group identities as well as 'authentic' individualities inside these groups. In this sense, I feel that the research questions below will not only provide a general framework for this study, but will also pave new pathways for further exploration.

- How might we discuss contemporary youth cultures? Is it possible to talk about coherent, strictly defined, homogenous youth subcultural formations?
- How are cultural identities formed in youth cultures and how are they defined as being 'alternative' or 'cool' against the majority of the society?
- What are the characteristics and semiotic resources of 'alternative' youth cultures that may be encountered in Izmir?
- What – if any – may be the common norms, values, beliefs, cultural practices and patterns of these cultural identities?
- Is it possible to define these groups with a specific ethos of consumption or structural determinants like social class, gender, ethnicity etc.?

- Do members of subculture groups have a specific use of language and space, preference of music, style, food, leisure activities? How and in which circumstances do they construct their identities?
- Is it the ways in which these members of alternative youth cultures position themselves against ‘popular culture’ that is a central element of their identity projects, or do popular culture and mainstream media create a space for their visibility and more importantly provide a variety of semiotic combinations and meanings for their identity formations?
- To what extent are their salient traits ‘distinctive’ and ‘authentic’? Do they have any problems with being ‘popular’ and ‘mainstream’?
- Alongside their own perception of self, how do they make sense of the world they live in? How do they express their opinions, feelings, emotions? Do they have any political agendas and engagements or are they concerned with social problems?

1.2 Importance of the Study

The importance of this study stems from the topic it engages with and the issues it attempts to tackle. In-depth research on youth cultures have the potential to give the most striking clues about the transformations within a particular society, its dominant cultural values and forms of sociality. Moreover, youth subculture analyses provide rich discussions that allow us to observe the ongoing, reflexive processes of identity construction and the social construction of meanings. To be more precise, opening up a debate on youth subculture that concentrates on the outlook, tastes, leisure time activities, or in short, all cultural practices regarding ‘life style’ paves the way for a stratified reading about today’s social, political, and cultural environment. As the author of this thesis, it is my contention that the limited nature of the literature on contemporary youth cultural identities within the context of rapid social and cultural transformations and the political conjuncture in Turkey and Izmir in particular, contribute to the importance of this research. In this sense, I hope for this study to not only compliment the scarce youth subculture literature in Turkey but also to lead to further research in this field.

1.3 Methodology

This study aims to question how and in which circumstances youth identities and their cultural meanings are constructed. Therefore, qualitative research methods offer themselves as more suitable research approaches due to the ways in which they make it possible to collect detailed data concerning daily practices, cultural meanings and identity formations. What I argue in this study is that the notion of youth identity is a dynamic, fluid and complex structure, and that culture needs to be conceptualised as an ongoing process as opposed to a static ‘whole way of life’. Therefore, instead of quantitative research techniques that will provide generalizable, ‘objective’ data, I look for subjective, deeper meanings in detail, which can only be acquired by qualitative research methods.

As Creswell (2007) clarifies,

Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, and a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and it extends the literature or signals a call for action (Creswell, 2007: 37).

In pursuit of a more flexible and creative research design, qualitative methods open up possibilities for new theoretical interpretations and thus, provide a multilayered reading of ‘alternative’ youth subcultural identities. The aim of this research is to discuss cultural meanings in an interactive process and to “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 3). Hence, a positivist approach would be insufficient for the sake of this study. In this sense, my examination is based on qualitative research analyses conducted in the specific social settings of my subjects. Furthermore, contrary to quantified data findings, the data I gather through my research is open to multiple interpretations. As Neuman suggests, qualitative researchers focus on “cases and contexts” and examine social phenomena in the “natural flow of social life” considering its particular context whereas most quantitative researchers espouse testing their hypotheses with measuring variables for objective and reliable

generalizations (2006: 151). Quantitative methods used in social sciences do not always offer the right or sufficient way to establish scientific findings to discuss social phenomena. As Silverman (2000) puts it,

Qualitative researchers suggest that we should not assume that techniques used in quantitative research are the only way of establishing the validity of findings from qualitative or field research. This means that a number of practices which originate from quantitative studies may be inappropriate to qualitative research. This include the assumptions that social science research can only be valid if based on experimental data, official statistics or the random sampling of populations and that quantified data are the only valid or generalizable social facts (Silverman, 2000: 7).

At first sight, qualitative data might be seen as personal and elusive especially with regards to validity, because it follows a nonlinear path and usually has potential to create new concepts by discovering new issues in cultural, social and historical context of the society. Yet what is documented, recorded and observed are reflections of social life within that specific cultural terrain. Thus, qualitative research methods allow perceiving the process of everyday life practices and cultural meanings from participants' own perspective, which would be impossible to attain through empirical quantitative data (Flick, 2007: 2). Since I try to understand how 'alternative' youth create meanings in their everyday life and construct cultural identities, I prefer to formulate research questions and explore this new social phenomenon by focusing on themes, distinctions, and different perspectives in my analysis rather than testing a hypothesis. As Creswell states, "qualitative research questions are open-ended, evolving, and nondirectional; they restate the purpose of the study in more specific terms; start with a word such as "what" or "how" rather than "why"; and are few in number (five to seven)" (2007: 107). In line with Creswell's claim, exploratory questions beginning with 'what' and 'how' are predominating in my research.

In my view, instead of reducing this research into variables or numerical measurements, youth cultural identities should be studied through their fluid and fluxional social processes with loosely formed research questions because "the choice of research practices depends upon the questions that are asked, and the questions depend on their context" (Grossberg et. al., 1992: 3). However, research questions could become clear or change direction during the research process as

Neuman articulates, logic in qualitative study arises from “ongoing practice” and follow a “nonlinear research path” (2013: 169). What I try to understand is how youth cultural identities and meanings are created hence it is useful to benefit from ethnographic field research methods to explore how culture works among ‘alternative’ youth. Creswell articulates that as a process, “ethnography involves extended observations of the group, most often through participant observation, in which the researcher is immersed in the day-to-day lives of the people and observes and interviews the group participants” (2007: 69). It is my contention that participant observation, focus group interviews and individual in depth interviews are complementary approaches and the most suitable methods to collect my data. Participant observation is a “qualitative research technique that provides the opportunity to study people in real-life situations. It is a form of ‘field research’ in which observations are carried out in real settings” (Berger, 2011: 189).

For this study, I have conducted my participant observation in third wave coffee shops, bars and cafes where cultural and art events are arranged, second hand and vintage shops, vegan/vegetarian cafes and streets of Alsancak where ‘alternative’ youth is visible. Moreover, I also attended one of the most well-known indie music festivals –Epic Fair- which is organized annually in Izmir. This festival has been an immensely productive experience as I have had the chance to write my field observations, take photos and videos and often meet new young people who later become participants for my interviews.

Although participant observation helps to discover common patterns and the general context of the relationships, motivations behind these opinions and actions can only be understood with further examinations such as in-depth interviews or semi structured interviews. Therefore, in this study, participant observation, semi structured interviews with youth groups and in-depth interviews with the owners and workers of the places where members of ‘alternative’ youth hang out are used as qualitative research methods. Instead of doing textual analysis, I have preferred to give voice to the subjects of this study so that they can narrate their own stories with their own words, which in turn will be more illuminating and provide a critical understanding on the meaning-making processes of youth.

Accordingly, I conducted three focus group interviews with ‘alternative’ youth groups, where each group consisted of 5-8 people. The total number of young

individuals I have interviewed this way was 18. Furthermore, I have conducted five in-depth interviews with the owners/workers of the places where young people enjoy spending time together. All interviews were recorded by courtesy of participants and transcribed later. All in-depth interviews were conducted in cafes and bars of Alsancak and focus groups were conducted in my office at the university through setting up appointments. I chose some of my participants while I was doing participant observation and met them in cafes, bars and concerts. Fortunately, all young people that I asked to interview were interested in my study right after I told them the topic of my thesis, and were eager and willing to express their opinions without hesitation. Even though I have not set an age range for this research, all participants ended up being between the age of 18 and 25. They were all white, middle class, Turkish university students who considered themselves ‘alternative’ to mainstream lifestyle in Turkey. I have conducted my interviews and focus groups with an equal number of male and female participants. I have prepared preliminary questions to tentatively lead the discussions in the focus groups and have tried to manage the conversations in light of my research questions.

I have favoured from the questions below to initiate discussions in my focus groups:

- Why are you interested in being different from the majority? What is wrong with being ordinary?
- What makes your stance different? What do you want to say about your lifestyle and cultural practices?
- Do you believe that style still matters? How do you define your style?
- What do you think about being cool? Are you cool? How do you describe coolness?
- What do you do in your leisure time? Is there any place that you never want to go? Similarly, is there any activity you say ‘I prefer not to do’?
- Could you tell me about your preference of space, music, food, consumptions, cultural activities?
- What do you think about the relationship between ‘alternative’ youth cultures, social media and popular culture?

I should like to clarify at this point that these questions have been prepared only as a starting point for the focus group discussions and that the conversations in these

focus groups and in my interviews have always proceeded in a manner of ‘stream of consciousness’. This has made the process much more unstructured, creative and fruitful. I have chosen to conduct my interviews with focus groups on purpose, because I seek out an alternative youth ‘subcultural’ formation or at least hope to find common values, norms, motivations and actions that they might have. Another reason for my preference of focus group was its possibility to enable lively discussions because “...the aim of the focus group is to initiate discussion between group members, and it is this interaction that makes the data distinct” (Bloor et. al., 2001: 58).

These discussions allow making comparisons among different expressions of youth including their body language, facial expressions, gestures etc. Besides, who dominates the group (if anyone at all) and how s/he comes to the forefront in focus groups may give clues and details about the dynamics of the group. As Lindlof and Taylor expressed, the work of social sciences researcher is always “situated in relationships” with the literature and the people they are studying, and hearing the voices of people enable him/her to understand “world of diverse, shifting and often contentious meanings” (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011: 74). On the other hand, “focus groups are a particularly advantageous method where these group norms, meanings and processes are hidden or counter-cultural, but focus groups are not the best means of mapping differences in individual behaviour change” (Bloor et. al., 2001: 90). Moreover, peer pressure and protection of privacy might be the handicaps of focus groups, which lead to the missing of meanings in details by the researcher (Berger, 2011: 195-196). Thus, using multiple approaches simultaneously becomes more comprehensive and beneficial particularly for this study.

1.4 Limitations

Throughout my research, I encountered two difficulties. The first one was the spatial limitation as I had to confine my field research to Alsancak, a central suburb of Izmir - mostly known as a meeting point for youngsters. However, there are also other lively neighbourhoods where youth reside, such as Bornova, Karşıyaka, Bostanlı that I have not had the chance to conduct field research in and had to exclude from the scope of my study. Nevertheless, looking back at my research after its completion, I can state that Alsancak was an accurate choice to carry out my fieldwork. It is a special suburb in Izmir with its rich cultural history and central

location. Furthermore, it gives young people an opportunity to experience lively urban life with variety of spaces for youth cultural events, leisure time activities and nightlife that give wide open space for my participant observation data. In this sense, I am convinced that my confinement to the Alsancak suburb has not hindered my research.

The second challenge that I tried to overcome was arranging of interviews in a limited time. I had a very difficult time gathering young people together in a room for focus group interviews due to their busy schedules which made it very difficult to set time periods that suited all my participants. I often came across my participants in bars, concerts and cafes but they were not always eager for long discussions while they were having fun. Thus, I met some of the participants for the first time during the focus group interviews which might have led to self-censorship in their expression of opinions and feelings on specific issues. Hence, I tried to open conversations with small talks and make them comfortable as much as possible before the interview.

CHAPTER II
THEORIZING POPULAR CULTURE & MASS SOCIETY
QUESTIONS, DEBATES AND ARGUMENTS

2.1 Early Theorizations of Popular/Mass Culture

The idea of popular culture and its ‘popularisation’ is linked to the arguments of mass culture which date back to 1920’s. This early period of 1900’s was crucial in understanding the evaluation of popular culture with reference to the growth of industrial production, the tense yet thought provoking political environment, the emergence of mass media and the commercialization of culture. The first issue that have had an influence on the development of popular culture theories is the debates on mass culture (Strinati, 2004: 3-5). Although the concept of mass society, which stemmed from the processes of industrialization and urbanization, began to be critically evaluated in a broader context after the Second World War, it had started being discussed in cultural theories towards the end of the 19th century and these debates escalated during the interwar period. According to Guins and Gruz, literary critics such as F.R. Leavis, Q.D. Leavis, T.S. Eliot and M. Arnold harshly criticized mass produced commodities as well as mass education because of their potential to cause a cultural decline and degeneration in the society. They believed that press, popular novels, radio and films lowered the standards and it was not possible to promote active engagement and critical contemplation through these mass produced commodities which were neither aesthetically nor morally satisfying (Guins and Gruz, 2005: 5).

Both mass produced industries and the rise of mass media which made available the dissemination of a great deal of images, sounds and messages to the many, raised the interest in mass culture. This interest evoked new questions on traditional forms of culture yet most of the criticisms were centered around the profit driven nature of mass production and its lack of originality. Mass culture was characterized for its profit-oriented standardized production and marketing strategies which were perceived as having the power to manipulate and exploit the so called ‘ignorant’, ‘passive’ and ‘homogenized’ masses. According to early theories, popular culture texts served as the medium of collective desires and fantasies.

While this seems to be a common meeting point, it is hard to come across one specific theory that every researcher comes to an agreement upon.

The mass society tradition, then, by no means constitutes a unified and tightly integrated body of theory. It should rather be viewed as a loosely defined 'outlook' consisting of a number of intersecting themes such as the decline of the 'organic community', the rise of mass culture, and the social atomization of 'mass man'. Taken collectively, these themes have articulated a polyphony of negative and pessimistic reactions to the related processes of industrialization, urbanization, the development of political democracy, the beginnings of popular education and the emergence of contemporary forms of 'mass communication' (Bennett, 2005: 28).

As Bennet articulates, to talk about one overarching theory of/on culture would be lacking if not misleading, rather it will be more fruitful to address key themes and arguments on this topic with reference to the concepts of 'mass culture', 'mass society' and 'popular culture'. As a point of initiation, a preliminary definition of popular culture could be one that considers it as a widely-favored culture by the majority and this definition often brings along the claim that popular culture is only "mass produced for mass consumption" making an emphasis on commercial culture and confines "the theoretical mapping of popular culture" into Americanization of culture. Second argument emphasizes the definition of popular culture as inferior to high culture which has connotations as authentic, unique, aesthetically valuable etc. whereas popular culture is underestimated for its mass-produced commercial nature. (Storey, 2009: 5-8). The pejorative connotation of popular culture and negative valuation of mass culture with traditional forms of culture were commonly adopted by early literary critics. When conveying the opinions of these literary critics, Strinati (2004) suggests that according to critics of mass culture;

the alleged aesthetic complexity, creativity, experiments and intellectual challenges of art cannot be achieved by the techniques or conditions which produce mass culture... equally folk culture has to be produced by an integrated community which knows what it is doing, and which can thereby guarantee the authenticity of its products (Strinati, 2004: 11).

Consequently, according to this perspective, neither art nor folk culture which is not 'culturally' satisfying as much as classical art but at least reflects the common interests and traditions of the people and is expected to be respected for its authenticity (MacDonald, 1953; Frith, 1983) could be produced by means of mass production. F.R. Leavis argues that (1930) the value of culture was threatened by

‘democratic’ commercial mass culture because it reduced the quality and hierarchy of culture by creating two oppositional sides in society: The minority culture and mass civilization. Likewise, early theories tended to be pessimistic about mass culture and claimed that it could break down the walls between social classes, taste and cultural distinctions. According to this perspective, mass culture blurred the distinctions between high culture and folk culture due to its lack of intellectual stimulation and for being geared specifically towards immediate sentimental needs.

Since mass culture and popular culture are seen as a part of the processes of mass production and components of mass media, America has been accepted as the home of mass culture with the Hollywood cinema, advertising, marketing, music and clothing industry as the heart of popular cultural production. Since America was the biggest capitalist force of mass production, scholars have criticized it for its lack of aesthetic and cultural values and placed emphasis on degenerative aspects of mass culture (Leavis, 1932; Arnold, 1932; Orwell, 1965 cited in Strinati, 2004: 19-22, 27). These negative arguments laid stress on the so-called worthlessness of American culture which was presumably aimed solely for entertainment in leisure time activities contrary to intellectual capability of literary culture and unique art forms. This perspective suggested that mass culture referred to popular culture which was nothing more than an instrument of political domination; homogenized, standardized, commercial culture for a mass market.

2.2 Marxism in Cultural Theory: Frankfurt School and the Critique of Mass Society

While debates on the degenerative aspect of mass culture was still prevalent in the literature, during the interwar period, alternative theories were beginning to emerge that had started discussing popular cultural forms. Among the first to formulate alternative theorizations on mass culture were scholars that drew on Marxism in general and specifically the affiliates of the Frankfurt School. Marx and Engels had argued that culture at large was determined by the means of economic production and organized around the base/superstructure relationship which ideologically served the interests of dominant groups in society. As they have stated, “the class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are

subject to it” (1978:173). Their ‘false consciousness’ and ‘alienation’ notions had a profound impact on the neo Marxist cultural theorists’ works in the later years. Frankfurt Scholars’ critique of capitalist society moved beyond the orthodox Marxist doctrine and economic determinism and mostly concentrated on the other means of productions such as cultural production and mass media.

The Frankfurt School, also known as the Institute of Social Research, which consisted of such theorists, was one of the most prominent representatives of this line of thought. Established by social scientists who shared Marxist Hegelian insights, theorists affiliated with the school attempted to criticize the capitalist social order and elements of mass media. One of the earliest and famous examples of these Marxist considerations of mass media and mass society can be found in Adorno and Horkheimer’s work titled *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944). Most particularly their culture industry concept is still relevant to some extent today and will be put to use within the context of this study in the analysis of contemporary youth subcultural identities. Adorno and Horkheimer asserted that all forms of popular culture were designed to satisfy the so-called needs of mass consumers for entertainment in their leisure time and that every work of art was turned into a consumer product shaped by the logic of capitalist rationality (1944).

As I have mentioned before, according to early perspectives the work of art was unique and authentic but now it was mass-produced, standardized and commodified. Adorno and Horkheimer argued that (1944) real authentic art had the capacity to demonstrate the inequalities and irrationality of the status quo, but what was seen or listened to in mass media had become the reproduction and reinforcement of the socially constructed reality, which served the dominant ideologies. Therefore, people were unable to take critical responsibility for their own actions because they were turned into passive objects of manipulation.

While the Frankfurt School thinkers emerged as contemporary critics of mass society and mass culture in the first half of the 20th century, it was still possible to find similarities between their work and the early literary critics who tended to claim the superiority of high culture. Most important of these similarities can be cited as their arguments that popular cultural forms served a conservative ideology. Similar to earlier literary critics the Frankfurt School scholars also held negative judgements on popular culture. Furthermore, they also had skeptical thoughts about

the effects of mass media within this context. However, an important distinction of the Frankfurt School thinkers was that they produced more complex and comprehensive theories and discussions on culture compared to their predecessors. For instance, Marxist theory of ideology served an important role in opening new pathways for cultural analysis, focusing on the social role of media in the reproduction processes of advanced capitalism. Althusser's (1970) theory of ideology put forth a new dimension for the analysis of the reproduction processes through his emphasis on repressive state apparatuses and ideological state apparatuses, which later influenced theorists such as Gramsci (1973) who developed the concept of hegemony.

The ideology concept is crucial in cultural analysis and has been used intensively because it allows for an analysis of popular cultural texts in their social and political context. Particularly critical theory suggests that ideology works for a certain masking, distortion, or concealment. How texts and practices present distorted images of reality and how power relations are constructed within society are related with the concept of ideology. It would be useful to consider ideology in a broad sense including all power relations surrounded by inequality, dominance, discrimination and exploitation. In this respect, texts in popular culture are not innocent, but are rather produced for the sake of dominant groups' interests (Storey, 2009: 3-4).

2.3 Cultural Theory in Late 1900s: From Critical Theory to Cultural Studies

During the 70s, the effects of antiwar protests, social and political transformations along with civil rights movements provided new fields and study approaches in cultural theory. More specifically, the emergence of critical cultural studies, postcolonial studies, ethnic studies have led to the critique of traditional ways of organizing knowledge. In the late 20th century, this intellectual progress proceeded with great diversity of issues on culture. Specifically, The Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies was the most influential research hub for the development of the Marxist and neo Marxist theorists working on critical cultural theory.

Through the rise of this more radical critical theory as expressed in the works of Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall, mass culture began to be criticized in the context of capitalist form of society, false consciousness,

commodification and hegemonic ideology (McQuail, 2005: 115-117). For instance, Williams is one among a number of scholars whose definition of culture has a pioneering role in cultural studies with an emphasis on social construction. His understanding of culture stems from signifying practices and texts that accepts culture as a whole way of life made up of meanings and cultural formations created by individuals (1981: 64-65). While his opinions and definitions of culture have played a pioneering role in paving the way for new understandings of culture, as the field of cultural studies developed and subjectivity, fluidity of identity and micro power relations within culture started gaining importance, Williams' take on culture as a 'whole way of life' started receiving criticisms. As Barker and Galasisnki have argued, "how we talk about culture and for what purposes" may lead up to more critical insights about culture rather than finding definitions of culture. "In so far as contemporary cultural studies has a distinguishing 'take' on 'culture' it is one which stresses the intersection of language, meaning and power (2001: 3). Fixed meanings in messages became a controversial topic and cultural studies approach suggested that meanings were constructed and reconstructed while messages could be decoded individually in accordance with social situations or the backgrounds of the receivers (Hall, 1980). For instance, in his renowned work titled "The rediscovery of ideology: Return of the repressed in media studies", Stuart Hall's central concern is with the diverse theoretical sources that have contributed to the formation of the 'critical paradigm' in media studies since the early 1960s" (Gurevitch et. al., 2005: 3). Moreover, works on other kinds of power relations and forms of dominance began to flourish.

Since the understanding of ideology and culture have undergone critical changes and turned towards more dynamic, interactive, studies related with popular culture not only escalated but also started becoming influenced from different approaches and disciplines. For instance, Althusserian elaboration of ideology, Gramsci's hegemony theory, feminist film studies, Lacanian psychoanalysis provided rich discussions on the theorizations of culture, race, gender, ethnicity, subcultures etc. New issues were raised by structuralist theorists who were mostly influenced by the work of linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. Storey clarified that "Louis Althusser in Marxist theory, Roland Barthes in literary and cultural studies, Michel Foucault in philosophy and history, Jacques Lacan in psychoanalysis,

Claude Lévi-Strauss in anthropology and Pierre Macherey in literary theory” were the prominent theorists scrutinizing different aspects of culture (2009: 111). As Johnson (2005) notes,

Recent developments in Marxist theory, in Britain for example through the ‘cultural’ traditions of Williams and Hall and through the importations of European ‘structuralisms’ (the theories of Lévi-Strauss, Althusser, Lacan and Gramsci), have meant that many of the important questions about the mass media and about ‘culture’ more generally are now posed within Marxism rather than between Marxism and other accounts (Johnson, 2005: 18).

In this sense, by 1970s, in the field of cultural theory Marxism had become the consolidating component. However, despite similarities in ideas among theorists, there were also inevitably variations and diversions in their approaches. For instance,

...there has been an attempt to theorize the relationship of texts to subjects. The subject, constituted in language, in Lacanian terminology, is not the unified subject of the Althusserian formulation and traditional Marxist view...A second movement within structuralism has involved a rejection of the base and superstructure model for a focus on the articulation of autonomous discourses (Gurevitch et. al., 2005: 20).

Both structuralist and post structuralist studies were influenced by Marxist theories. Though most of them moved beyond the limits of classical Marxist theory of ideology. Their common point was the critique of traditional knowledge of culture and power by way of developing new perspectives on these issues. For instance Hall (1980, 2006), whose works have been highly influential in the field of cultural studies, focused on different reading positions as well as class cultural formations and cultural identities. According to Hall the culture of the oppressed was the area to what the term popular referred. Likewise, Fiske suggested to take popular culture into account as an area of struggle, ‘a culture of conflict’ and saw culture as a continuing ‘social process’ (1991: 1-2).

2.4 Postmodern Theories and Popular Culture

From a linguistic perspective, structuralism claimed that the sense of reality is constructed by language -a system of signs- with the aim of making explicit the rules and conventions for the production of meaning (Storey, 2009: 113-114).

Moving from here, Eagleton (1996) stated that,

Structuralism in general is an attempt to apply this linguistic theory to objects and activities rather than language itself. You can view a myth, wrestling match, system of tribal kinship, restaurant menu or oil painting as a system of signs, and a structuralist analysis will try to isolate the underlying set of laws by which these signs are combined into meanings (Eagleton, 1996: 84).

Post structuralism and postmodernism emerged as a critique of the structuralist views and analyses. In post structuralism, meaning of a text is always in process and it is suggested that 'signifiers' do not produce 'signifieds' but they produce more 'signifiers'. Many scholars in this approach believed in the fluidity of meaning and wide variety of interpretations (Derrida, 1973; Foucault, 1989; Baudrillard, 1981; Kristeva, 1980). They opposed the idea that meaning is fixed and determined within structures. Rather they claimed the active process of meaning making with different reading options. The main criticism of poststructuralist perspective against structuralism is the way that things are defined which were mostly within rigid boundaries. Therefore, according to this claim, there is little room for freedom and autonomy in structuralism. As Eagleton has put it, "ideologies like to draw rigid boundaries between what is acceptable and what is not, between self and non-self, truth and falsity, sense and nonsense, reason and madness, central and marginal, surface and depth" (1996: 115). Similarly, postmodernist approach has moved in the same direction and criticized the limits of modernist tradition. The criticism of modern capitalist world has gradually led to the growth of new genres and art movements such as Avant garde and weakened the power of high/elite cultural forms. On this topic, Susan Sontag's famous work "Against Interpretation" (1967) was highly influential for the development of postmodern theories. When elaborating on the emergence and the evolution of postmodernism in social thought, McRobbie (2005) highlights Sontag's contribution as follows,

Twenty years ago Susan Sontag (1967) offered an interesting perspective on those forms of popular culture which are good because they are so awful. This was reflective of a camp sensibility, the essence of which is 'its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration'...In her essay Sontag stressed the importance of the knowing audience, one which could allow itself absorption because it was equally capable of detachment. This is useful to us here because it offers a fruitful way forward in understanding the more combative side, particularly in young people's engagement with culture (McRobbie, 2005: 18).

While on one level, postmodernism included a critique of modernist thought as I have tried to touch on above, on the another level, it emerged as a criticism of modern capitalist world. Irony, blurring of traditional boundaries, fluid identities, intertextuality, pastiche, appropriation and bricolage, self-reflexivity and the excess of surface were counted as common characteristics of postmodernism (O'Shughnessy, 1999: 254-273). The term postmodernism was coined by Fredric Jameson (1991) to describe contemporary global society with rapid cultural changes. He defines postmodernism as a style of cultural production which is relevant to aesthetic products and believes that it is not possible to make new creations in culture anymore. On the contrary, McRobbie (2005) highlights the positive sides of postmodernism in the analyses of popular culture products as follows,

Unlike the various strands of structuralist criticism, postmodernism considers images as they relate to and across each other. Postmodernism deflects attention away from the singular scrutinizing gaze of the semiologist, and asks that this be replaced by a multiplicity of fragmented, and frequently interrupted, 'looks' (McRobbie, 2005: 12).

All these debates pronounced by scholars, regardless of their works being labeled as structuralist or postmodern, have been highly productive in broadening the discussions on mass culture, mass society and popular culture. Critical arguments on culture in general provide for the transformation of the concepts of popular culture or mass culture from a pejorative valuation to positive connotations. Thus, it becomes clear that the term popular culture offers more than just a strict definition of a standardized and homogenous culture, due to its openness to new interpretations and different meanings. As Brooker points out, "The study of popular culture is therefore confronted with a range of questions: concerning definition and value, the role of the culture industries, and the reception and use of popular cultural products" (2003: 195).

2.5 Youth and Subcultures: Emerging Fields in Cultural Theory

According to more contemporary thinkers, early mass culture theories had two major flaws. One of these was related to how they focused on the production processes per se and generally neglected to focus on culture at large. This tendency began to change with more contemporary takes on Marxist ideology and Frankfurt School's critique of mass society. Secondly, it came to be argued that early

approaches to mass culture tended to ignore the audience who were socially and culturally differentiated and failed to notice that cultural taste might be socially constructed (Strinati, 2004: 42). It was the British Cultural Studies tradition that later on carried out more detailed popular culture analyses emphasizing the social agency of the individual. It was with this new emphasis on subjectivity that particularly studies on class, race, ethnicity, gender, minority groups and youth culture gradually increased. As I have touched upon before, the interrelation between youth and culture began to be critically evaluated through such works as Hall and Jefferson's research on working class youth culture (2006) within the British tradition. These years are specifically important because they have witnessed major social and political changes and the rise of human rights issues from antiwar protests to 'black power' movements. Similarly, it was during the 70s that youth subculture movements such as Punks, Skinheads, Hippies, LGBTQ, Goths etc. started spreading around the world.

Even though the notion of 'youth' was academically studied under the field of criminology during 1950s; its relation to culture was never taken into account (Gelder, 2006) until the last few decades of the 20th century in which cultural aspects of youth started to be spoken about and taken seriously in academia. From this point on, culture studies have been the subject of interdisciplinary research because of their "complex stratifications" and potential to engage different "societal formations". The importance of popular culture and its interaction with subculture formations increasingly became prominent because of the "globally interconnected world where ideas, styles, music, people, technology and capital circulate and collide in complex ways, and on a scale and with a speed previously unimaginable" (Morley and Robins, 1995 cited in Muggleton, 2003: 7). It is clear that popular culture offers limitless opportunities for subcultural practices, which address different tastes. Nevertheless, it should be noted that tastes and cultural distinctions are in a state of flux and their formation and transformation is a dynamic process, they manifest themselves in everyday activities and youth culture formations.

Within the scope of this study, contemporary subcultural phenomena will be under scrutiny as a new tendency in popular culture. On the one hand, one can argue that popular culture and mass media have a positive driving force for the emergence and growth of youth subculture groups. On the other hand, while these cultural

forms have emerged as forms of 'subculture', which involve distinctive patterns from the majority's culture, how they could remain 'alternative' is a question worth elaborating on. Their cultural practices might transform into something new or might completely dissolve into mass culture. Since youth subcultures involve divergent and disharmonious features, I believe that they deserve to be discussed through a variety of optics, ranging from Frankfurt School's culture industry theory to postmodern identity theories. One of the harshest critiques of postmodern culture theory emerges at this intersection and emphasizes its lack of attention to race, class, ethnicity and gender issues in the formation of subcultures. It is claimed that in its preoccupation with modes of niche consumption and lifestyle, the postmodern culture theory neglects attending to the role of above mentioned issues in its analysis of subcultures. This debate still has lively discussions among youth culture researchers and leads to opposing poles.

I argue in this thesis that for a better understanding of contemporary subcultures we need to be able to speak from the intersection of these different theories. I will not only show how it is inevitable to find postmodern elements in the processes of identity construction and cultural practices among young participants of this study, but will also emphasize how these identities and practices may be articulated within the confines of culture industries. It may be claimed that representation of hipster subculture in media and attached cultural activities such as shopping in second hand/vintage shops, 3rd wave coffee houses, listening to indie music etc. may be understood through the 'culture industry' theory, simply because postmodern identities are constructed mostly by their ethos of consumption, leisure activities and styles. Approached from this perspective, their 'new styles' or 'cultural commodities' might not be seen as real or creative but rather labelled as pastiche and plagiarism. This theory of Jameson (1991) sees no future for new production or creativity in culture. However, it may also be argued that, despite the importance of the debates on cultural phenomena being 'copy vs. original/real', subculture formations can actually carry a potential for a possible creation in culture.

In this thesis, my argument rests on the premise that there is a strong connection between popular culture and mass culture debates and emerging youth subcultural identities. In this sense, for the benefit of this study, I propose to adopt a multilayered reading of popular culture and subculture arguments, as I am

convinced that such an approach will prove more fruitful in unravelling new dimensions for this research.

2.6 The Role of Mass Media in Popular Culture

McQuail argues that mass media are largely responsible for the emergence of the discussions on ‘mass culture’ and ‘popular culture’. The issue of mass culture and the question of ‘quality’ in popular culture have led to the emergence of new media-cultural theories such as critical cultural theory questioning ideological as well as political-economic aspects of production of culture and knowledge (2005: 114-117). It is clear that the role of mass media is quite prevalent in making many cultural experiences widely available for the majority of the people, which in turn has sparked new perspectives that tend to discuss these cultural forms which vary in genres, images, texts and representations among different media instruments (Strinati, 2006: 37) such as popular movies, novels, music, advertisements etc. As I have discussed in previous sections, the pejorative approaches towards popular culture began to lose their validity, particularly during the second half of the 20th century and new theories have emerged as a reaction which mostly focus on more positive aspects of popular culture and mutual interaction between culture and people. The idea of active audiences and their power to make contributions to and transform the culture is revealed and discussed through multi perspectives.

During the 1980s and 1990s a critical mass of consumption studies built up, extending beyond television to a concern with commodities in general. Here, consumers were held to be active creators of meaning bringing previously acquired cultural competencies to bear on texts. Fiske (1987) in particular argued that popular culture is constituted not by texts but by the meanings that people produce through them. Similarly, Willis argued (1990) that young people have an active, creative and symbolically productive relation to the commodities that are constitutive of youth culture (Barker and Galasisnki, 2001: 7-8).

In the 21st century, cultural forms are proliferated and disseminated so rapidly by mass media instruments to all parts of the world that what is trendy or fashionable may be determined and changed in seconds in social media. Therefore, this side of popular culture might involve a potential for fostering democracy and pluralism. “Developments in mass media, the culture industries, and personal communications technologies in some respects offer new and often better ways to connect, communicate, and form meaningful social relationships and communities”

(Lull, 2006: 55). In a similar way, McRobbie has supported the positive aspects of media and laid stress on new opportunities that popular culture offers. For instance, she gives examples from the representations of the Third World that their visibility moves beyond “the realist documentary, or the exotic televisual voyage. The Third World refuses now to be reassuringly out of sight of ‘us’, in the West” (McRobbie, 2005: 15). In a similar manner, Hebdige, whose work on subculture has had an enormous impact on youth studies, points out that American popular culture offers limitless semiotic combinations and meanings which are unique and original. Youth consume these styles, images, music in active and imaginative ways that have the power to convert them into distinctive tastes (Hebdige, 1979). Levi Strauss’ bricolage concept (1962) is developed by Dick Hebdige to show how youth construct their identities through combining different and complex elements of culture. From this point of view, it could be said that arguments on Americanization via mass media or cultural imperialism tend to ignore the complexities of mass culture. As Morley (2006) states, “all cultures absorbed and indigenized elements from other sources” and that

there is more than one ‘centre’ in relation to which a whole variety of different cultural peripheries are constituted...Not all cultural flows run, automatically in the same uniform direction, from Hollywood to the rest of the world. Rather there is ‘hybridity all the way down’ (Morley, 2006: 37, 40).

The widespread use of internet around the world and popular social media channels have been influential in this hybridity and have made it possible to share a great number of images and texts all the while leading to the dissemination of a wide range of messages. Furthermore, these new media forms make consuming these messages much easier and quicker compared to the past, which also changes the general perception on what is popular or outdated. As McRobbie (2005) has noted, popular culture products from billboard advertisements to popular soap operas have a considerable impact on social life.

Images push their way into the fabric of our social lives. They enter into how we look and what we earn, and they are still with us when we worry about bills, housing and bringing up children. They compete for attention through shock tactics, reassurance, sex and mystery, and by inviting viewers to participate in series of visual puzzles. Billboard advertisements showing an image without a code impose themselves, infuriatingly, on the most recalcitrant passer-by (McRobbie, 2005: 17).

But what is ignored most of the time is the new study fields which analyze popular culture with relation to the increased media literacy.

Almost all new disciplines in the arts and social sciences make use of pop imagery, whether in adult education, in degree courses, or on project work with unemployed young people. This gives rise to a rather more optimistic reading of the mass media than that offered by Baudrillard. The invasive impact of these new technologies, because they now occupy a place within these institutions, provides a basis for the production of new meanings, new cultural expressions (ibid: 2005: 17-18).

As a concluding comment I can state that my critical engagement with the cultural theories in this chapter, have shown me the problematic aspects of adopting a single overarching theoretical framework for gaining a better understanding on the subject of this study. The multiplicity of approaches towards conceptualizing and understanding culture make it extremely difficult to speak of a transcending theory that explains the phenomenon from all perspectives. Furthermore, along with the variety of theorizations, what makes this endeavor even more difficult and sophisticated is the diverse meanings that exist for the word 'culture' itself – particularly within the context of the notion of popular culture. In an attempt to come to grips with these difficulties, this study opts to adopt a multilayered approach towards understanding culture, which involves favoring from a multitude of theories ranging from Frankfurt School's culture industry thesis to postmodern takes on cultural theory.

CHAPTER III

A CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH THE LITERATURE ON YOUTH SUBCULTURES

3.1 Early Perspectives in Youth Subculture Theory

Youth culture theory has been subject to a great variety of controversial issues in the related fields of social sciences and humanities for a long time. The concept of subculture finds its origins in youth culture theory as a subfield with critically and politically rich discussions on culture ranging from Chicago School's strain theory to Birmingham School's cultural studies. It would be safe to suggest that the concepts of subculture, youth and leisure studies have been mostly neglected in social sciences until the turn of 1970s. These issues started becoming central topics particularly following the publication of Hall and Jefferson's comprehensive book on British working-class youth titled 'Resistance Through Rituals' (1975), in which working class youth's class resistance to hegemonic institutions were contextualized through the examples of British subcultures such as the Teddy boys, mods and skinheads (Bennett and Kahn-Harris, 2004: 1). Hall and Jefferson (2006) argue that the word 'culture' in 'youth culture' refers to the cultural aspects of youth studies. They pose a question about the word 'culture' with its relation to youth social groups who "give expressive form to their social and material life-experience... Culture is the way the social relations of a group are structured and shaped: but it is also the way those shapes are experienced, understood and interpreted" (Hall and Jefferson, 2006: 4). Therefore, youth culture studies focus on the different patterns of cultural experiences of a group which has alternative values and beliefs from the majority.

While there is no consensus on what the earliest subcultural formation may be, it is widely accepted that the first examples of subculture belonged to fictional characters of 'rouge literature' which was influenced by the underground criminals of the sixteenth century London. According to Gelder, the cultural history of subcultures dates back to mid-sixteenth century London, "with the emergence here of an 'Elizabethan underworld' and the popularisation of a genre of pamphlet-writing loosely referred to as 'rogue literature', devoted to the chronicling of criminal types and criminal activities in and around the city" (2006: 4). Hence,

while roue literature might be pinned down as the earliest texts in which subcultural forms have been mentioned, according to Tolson (1997) the writings of Henry Mayhew, on the origins of poverty in industrial urban areas of London, might be one of the first researches conducted on subcultures, albeit without using the word 'subculture' (Tolson, 1997 cited in Bennett & Kahn Harris, 2004: 3). However, the notion of subculture was never conceptualised as an academic field of study until it drew the attention of urban sociologists of the Chicago School. Therefore, it could be said that the earliest coherent subcultural studies performed by a group of sociologists took place at the University of Chicago around 1920s (Williams, 2007: 572).

3.1.1 Chicago School, Urban Sociology and its Critiques

The development of social sciences and the emergence of new research methods such as interviews, participant observation and ethnographic fieldwork enriched the quality of projects in urban sociology. As Gelder (2006) has stated, the origins of subculture studies is closely related with the interest in human sciences and colonialism in the late nineteenth century.

Studies of subcultures as we know them today find their origins in several of the human sciences emerging during this period: criminology and social reportage, as well as anthropology and ethnography, those classificatory human sciences which had gained momentum in the wake of colonialism and the spread of the various European empires into other countries (Gelder, 2006: 11).

The growth of industrialization lead to major social and cultural transformations in urban life that also changed the direction of academic interests in social sciences. Especially a group of sociologists from Chicago University (Anderson, 1923; Park, 1925; Thrasher, 1927; Cressey, 1932) turned their attention to more empirical researches on 'marginal' groups with ethnographic field research rather than theoretical approaches. The first study of Chicago School was Anderson's 'The Hobo' (1923) which comprised of real life stories of hobo community in Chicago and had a pioneering role for subculture studies. Because Anderson himself used to be an itinerant worker experiencing hobo life himself, he could infiltrate into the 'hobo' culture, and became one of the pioneers of 'participant observation'. According to him, the only place where no racism and social hierarchies existed was the hobo groups' "jungle" (Anderson, 1923: 20).

Other early key figures from Chicago School of sociology were Robert Park with 'The City' in which he analysed the social and cultural aspects of immigrants in Chicago (1925) and Frederic Thrasher's 'The Gang' that involved field observations as well as interviews with gang members (1927).

Similarly, Cressey's 'The Taxi-Dance Hall: A Sociological Study in Commercialised Recreation and City Life' was based on real life stories, anecdotes and data from ethnographic fieldwork and was entirely devoted to the lives of women who worked in dance clubs in Chicago (1932). Despite the differences in their research settings, what was common among all these early works of the Chicago School was their view of the 'social world' and interest in new immigrants in Chicago's streets. They analysed this "distinct social world" with its "own ways of acting, talking and thinking... its own vocabulary, its own activities and interests..." (Cressey, 1932: 31-32 cited in Gelder, 2006: 38). "The Chicago School also came to be associated with a specific kind of urban micro-sociology which gave particular attention to the interaction of people's perception of themselves with other's view of them" (Thornton and Gelder, 1997: 11). What makes Chicago School scholars important for subculture studies is the way they have approached criminal acts as social phenomena with their common life practices, rather than labelling them with particular psychological problems. For instance, 'The Professional Thief' by Sutherland (1937), 'The Jack Roller' (1930) by Shaw, and Cohen's 'Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang' (1955) are criminology texts which deal with social practices of criminals. The first sociologist who used the term subculture in his book was M. Gordon with 'The Concept of Sub-Culture and Its Application' (1947). His work is beyond the 'social difference' perspective of Chicago School and focuses on subcultures with considering social aspects of collectivity. Another key work of Chicago School was Becker's 'Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance' (1963) in which he studied marijuana use especially among Jazz musicians in Chicago.

Despite the fact that these early studies in Chicago School aroused interest for further youth subculture researches, their weakest point was the strong emphasis they put on social difference and deviance of the groups they analysed. Nevertheless, 1960s was a period in which the concept of subculture began to flourish among other related fields of social sciences and even became a subject for

new interdisciplinary research areas such as cultural studies with rich discussions in Birmingham School. In this sense, cultural studies shifted the direction of subculture theory with a broader context including social, political and cultural aspects of youth culture.

3.1.2 Marxism, Cultural Studies and its Critiques

The Chicago School's conceptualization of subculture with their deviance theory situated in social and partially cultural contexts have been highly influential in paving the way for new perspectives in subculture theory. Following up on the Chicago School's urban micro sociology and deviance theory, it was the Frankfurt School thinkers who made significant contributions on mass society and mass culture debates which questioned the production of culture and knowledge, as mentioned in the previous chapter of this thesis. Following up on the Frankfurt School, with the overall influence of French structuralist theory; the members of The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (from here on CCCS) at The Birmingham School such as Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke and Paul E. Willis mainly adopted a Marxist-structuralist approach in their analyses of subcultural formations. 1960s and 1970s were the years in which an explicitly subcultural approach to the study of working-class youth was developed at CCCS (Williams, 2007: 573). The edited collection of Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson's 'Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain' (1975) became the most influential source for CCCS' key works on subcultures. Because the post-war period witnessed the rise of capitalism and consumerism, the subculture theory of CCCS was highly political and involved issues such as the critique of class oppression, ideological domination and power relations in everyday life. Cultural studies scholars define subcultures as sub sets of larger cultural networks yet believe that subcultures have power to struggle and resist and even change these networks of larger cultural configurations.

In modern societies, the most fundamental groups are the social classes, and the major cultural configurations will be, in a fundamental though often mediated way, 'class cultures'. Relative to these cultural-class configurations, *sub*-cultures are sub-sets – smaller, more localised and differentiated structures, within one or other of the larger cultural networks. We must, first, see subcultures in terms of their relation to the wider class-cultural networks of which they form a distinctive part (Hall and Jefferson, 2006: 6).

They put forward four major changes in social, political and economic life that have a determining role for the emergence of youth culture.

The first of these is the important set of inter-related changes hinged around 'affluence', then increased importance of the market and consumption, and the growth of the 'Youth-oriented' leisure industries... The second nexus of changes with which Youth Culture came to be readily identified, as an unfortunate by-product, were those surrounding the arrival of mass communications, mass entertainment, mass art and mass culture... The third set of changes which were said to have 'produced' a qualitatively distinct Youth Culture turned around a hiatus in social experience precipitated by the war... The fourth set of changes which provided an important context for the 'emergence' of Youth Culture related to the sphere of education... Last, but by no means least, the arrival of the whole range of distinctive styles in dress and rock-music cemented any doubts anyone may have had about a 'unique' younger generation (ibid, 2006: 11-13).

Contrary to the empirical background of the Chicago School, CCCS tradition is usually based on theoretical analyses of subcultures found in media texts. Their intellectual point of view is highly influenced by the work of Gramsci (1971), in particular by the ways in which he explains political and ideological control over classes through the notion of hegemony. Therefore, the CCCS thinkers argued that youth subcultures emerged to make change in this hegemonic struggle with their 'styles' within the larger cultural networks that CCCS researchers referred to as the 'parent culture' and/or the 'dominant culture'. According to them, the dominant culture is the culture of the majority. It is the most inclusive, "all-embracing, universal culture. Other cultural configurations will not only be subordinate to this dominant order: they will enter into struggle with it, seek to modify, negotiate, resist or even overthrow its reign – its hegemony" (Hall and Jefferson, 2006: 5-6). On the other hand, parent culture is very important for the analysis of subculture groups because they are considered as the sub-sets of their parent culture. Youth subcultures are encountered not only in the parent culture through their "kinship, friendship networks, the informal culture of the neighbourhood, and the practices articulated around them" but also in the dominant culture - "not in its distant, remote, powerful, abstract forms, but in the located forms and institutions which mediate the dominant culture to the subordinate culture, and thus permeate it."

In this sense, youth subculture emerges at this “intersection between the located parent culture and the mediating institutions of the dominant culture” (ibid, 2006: 41). What is peculiar about subcultures is their common activities, culturally distinct ways of life, and the territorially determined spaces where they hang out. As Blackman defined, subcultures are groups who have “different patterns of behaviour and alternative values from the mainstream who pursue and act out their own cultural solutions” (2005: 2). Their social relations and cultural experiences both shape and are shaped by the “dominant culture”. To put it simply, it could be said that subcultures are a group of people who differ from other social groups and have things in common to share among themselves.

As part of working class subcultures Punks, Skinheads, Teddy boys, and Mods were addressed as early subcultural groups in terms of their relation with the dominant culture, consumption of cultural practices and commodities, choice of gathering spaces, and more importantly their distinct styles. They had their own spaces and subcultural values specific to their community. In this regard, Cohen’s ‘Sub-Cultural Conflict and Working Class Community’ (1972) argued how the youth were affected by their ‘parent culture’, mass culture and consumer society. As Gelder pointed out “there is always some scope for ‘resistance’, for ‘winning space’ back from the ruling classes. As with Cohen, subcultures were seen to do this in two main ways: territorially, by winning or claiming their own ‘space’ (as distinct from owning property) and investing it with ‘subcultural value’; and in terms of style, by using commodities, the signs of ‘dominant culture’, differently” (Gelder, 2006: 90).

Another key work of British Cultural Studies in 1970s is Dick Hebdige’s ‘Subculture: The Meaning of Style’ (1979). In his work Hebdige talks about the function of subculture with relation to class and power relations and proposes that a subculture cannot be an “independent organism functioning outside the larger social, political and economic context” (Hebdige, 2002: 76). Just like other scholars of cultural studies, he makes a special emphasis on the spheres of style and leisure. CCCS scholars who focused on youth subcultures believed that “through dress, activities, leisure pursuits and life-style, they may project a different cultural response or ‘solution’ to the problems posed for them by their material and social class position and experience” (Hall and Jefferson, 2006: 8). Case studies of

Jefferson's Teds, Clarke's Skinheads, Hebdige's Punks and mods are classical texts, however within the CCCS tradition youth subcultures are usually studied through a narrow scope with a focus on the working class, white and male subcultures. On a similar note, despite the fact that the subculture theory emerged out of the lively political and cultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s, McRobbie's and Garber's influential works on girls' bedroom culture (1991) put aside, it can be claimed that most of these studies have ignored women, black youth or middle class subcultures (e.g. Hippies). Despite this narrow focus, it was the first time youth leisure activities, mass culture, mass communication and unique 'styles' were discussed in an interdisciplinary manner, which in turn makes all these works important within the context of subculture studies despite their various shortcomings.

It should be noted that cultural studies scholars discussed these youth subcultures in post war period focusing on working class resistance to hegemonic institutions. Thornton and Gelder (1997) briefly expressed the aim of cultural studies scholars in studying subcultures as follows,

their work thus turned to the distinctive 'look' of these subcultures; but the primary aim was to locate them in relation to three broader cultural structures, the working class or the 'parent culture', the 'dominant' culture, and mass culture. Youth subcultures were always working-class youth subcultures, thus further narrowing the field of activity under analysis, and their subcultural status was linked to their class subordination (Thornton and Gelder, 1997: 83, 84).

Most of the CCCS researchers were criticized because of their lack of attention to youth subcultures outside of working class community and their highly theoretical framework by using media sources with Marxist-structuralist approaches. As Huq (2006) puts it,

In some ways it is easier to criticise the Birmingham School by highlighting the categories of youth excluded from their analysis rather than those included... movements of the 1960s and 1970s including feminism and antiracism, women and black youth receive at best only a partial treatment in early subcultural studies... For the CCCS, youth were social actors in highly circumscribed contexts, subject to structural constraints not of their own making and largely beyond their control. This criticism is one that is strongly connected to the third which deals with methodological concerns. The heavy emphasis on (Marxist-structuralist) theory is at the expense of the empirical grounding of the Chicago School tradition... the majority of the contents of 'Resistance through Rituals' is based on media sources.

Needless to say, such marginalisation of subjects such as ethnic minority youth and girls leads to distortion (Huq, 2006: 10, 11).

In this sense, a major critique of early cultural studies researchers was that while they focused on working class subcultures and their ways of resistance, they failed to see the practices of youth in general, including local cultural formations and ordinary youth. Nevertheless, there were exceptions and scholars that moved beyond the tradition of Birmingham School. For instance, P. Willis' 'Profane Culture' (1978), was an ethnographic study of two divergent subcultures: Hippies and bikers which belonged to different classes. Likewise, Cohen's 'Folk Devils and Moral Panics' (1972) had a different perspective because it considered subcultures with relation to mass media's effect. According to him, youth subcultures are mediated through popular cultural forms such as television, advertisements, popular magazines, music and Hollywood movies, and through this process they are either transformed into something different or made over.

This theoretical groundwork which is constituted by different approaches paves the way for broader theoretical and empirical interdisciplinary works in contemporary subculture studies. Within this context, Jenks (2005) suggested that there are four approaches in subcultural theory that played a significant role for the development of youth cultural studies.

First, there is the early social ecology of the working-class neighbourhood carried out in the late fifties and early sixties. Second, there is the relation of the delinquent subculture to the sociology of education, a tradition which is still continuing. This examines the relationship of leisure and youth culture as an alternative to achievement in the school. Third, there is the cultural emphasis of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University. This approach, which is influenced by the new criminology developed by the National Deviancy Conferences, used a Marxist framework to consider youth cultures and their style, in terms of their relationship to class, dominant culture and ideology. Involved in this is the attempt to examine the ethnography of youth culture, their relation to popular culture and their moments in class history. Lastly there are the contemporary neighbourhood studies which look at local youth groups, not as the early social ecologists did, but in the light of influence by contemporary deviancy theory and social reaction (Brake, 1980: 50 cited in Jenks, 2005: 15).

While I find Jenks' argument meaningful on many aspects – particularly with reference to 1960s, 70s and even 80s, it is my contention that in contemporary times the boundaries and cultural practices of contemporary subcultures are not as ridged

and clear-cut as they appear in the works of CCCS scholars in 1970s. Therefore, I argue in my thesis that a better understanding of the current youth culture needs more critical examination and a multiperspectival approach because of the socially and culturally pluralist societal structure of our times and the ways in which we are immersed in a rich multimedia environment in unprecedented ways.

3.2 Contemporary Approaches to Youth Culture: Rethinking Analytical Concepts

Up until here I have offered a general review on the history of subculture studies that have contributed to the formation of the field over the past century. In this section, I elaborate on more recent research that has been conducted on subcultures. In doing this however, I also aim to touch on the problematique of labelling members of subculture groups for the sake of academic research. It is my contention that this self-reflection, will in turn, help me rethink the ways in which I can refer to the subjects of my own study. In this sense, from here on, I deliberately choose to use ‘youth culture’ or ‘youth studies’ in general as my working concepts instead of the word ‘subculture’ because of its limitations and problematic sides which I will touch upon in the following paragraphs.

For the last decade youth subcultures have been conceptualized with more postmodern readings with the influence of postmodern theoretical approaches in cultural analyses. Postmodern perspectives allow for more creative and emancipatory ways to consider subcultural practices without any constraints and deterministic views. As Blackman states, “for postmodernists, subcultures react imaginatively through consumption and identity to construct creative meanings that can be liberating from subordination. Postmodern subcultural theory seeks to move away from models of social constraint...” (2005: 8). On the other hand however, this view is criticized for being too loose for a coherent argument as well as its distance to categorisations such as social class, ethnicity, race, sexuality and so on. As argued by Schildrick & MacDonald (2006), those who adopt a postmodern approach to cultural analysis “tend to ignore the youth cultural lives and identities of less advantaged young people and that, theoretically, they tend to under-play the potential significance of class and other social inequalities in contemporary youth culture” (2006: 126).

According to postmodern subcultural theory, identity is a free floating experience and determined by self-choice as opposed to being imposed on masses as a social construct. Postmodern cultural theorists consider cultural meanings in commodities and niche consumption practices important for self-expression and individuality. As Williams mentions, “youths’ subcultural practices become meaningful through stylization, from slang terms and secret hand-signs to food preferences, music and dance forms” (2007: 579). Even though different postmodern expressions were formulated to be used as means to label and understand subcultures such as *scenes* (Redhead, 1993), *neo tribes* (Bennett, 1999), *channels* (Singh, 2000), and *temporary substream networks* (Weinzierl, 2000); their common point was their recognition of the importance of alternative lifestyle as a key concept by which youth described/distinguished themselves, through the use of specific cultural commodities for the sake of being authentic or different. What is fundamentally different in this line of thought compared to cultural studies scholars’ assumption is that the concept of subculture in postmodern approaches involves complex stratifications including mutual interaction between subcultures and other social and cultural formations such as social media and cultural industries. Kahn and Kellner (2003) point out the line between subcultures and post subcultures with their particular emphasis on media awareness and globalization as follows,

if the dominant culture provides the semantic codes by which cultures attempt to transmit and reproduce themselves then subcultures represent a challenge to this symbolic order in their attempt to institute new grammars and meanings through which they interpret the world, and new practices through which they transform it. In this sense, alternative subcultures strive to capture media attention, and in so doing become involved in the Janus-faced process of attempting to transform dominant codes even as they become appropriated, commodified, and redefined by the dominant culture that they contest...To speak of post-subcultures, then, is to recognize that the new emerging subcultures are taking place in a world that is saturated with media awareness and being propelled into new global configurations by technological advances such as the Internet and multi-media (Kahn and Kellner, 2003: 299).

The post-subculture theory highlights the importance of consumption with its semiotic power for new and imaginative productions. Bennett argues that consumption is a “motor-force in the late modern society and a key resource for individuals in the construction of social identities and forming of social relations

with others” (2005: 255). While this line of thought has its supporters, over the years it has become the object of criticism by scholars who have claimed that social class is still an essential element for the construction of identity and that postmodern readings have neglected social inequality with their central focus on lifestyles (Hollands, 2002; Hollingworth, 2015; Blackman, 2005; Hesmondhalgh, 2005).

For Blackman and Hesmondhalgh, the fact of class and other structurally embedded forms of inequality appear to act as dead weights on young people. Such a position, however, grossly underestimates the agency of youth in creatively resisting the circumstances of their everyday lives... In point of fact, however, youth consumption encompasses a broad range of activities that, in addition to buying things, also includes dancing, listening to the radio, watching television, reading magazines, and so on—none of which demand particularly high levels of disposable income (Bennett, 2005: 256).

Similarly, Maffesoli discusses that group identities should be considered beyond “traditional structural determinants (like class, gender or religion); rather, consumption patterns and practices enable individuals to create new forms of contemporary sociality—small-scale social configurations that operate beyond modernist class borders” (2003: 12). It will be argued in this thesis that contemporary youth cultures should be reconceptualised with the same level of flux and fluidity in cultural transformations. Thus, the question ‘is it possible/sufficient to define youth culture groups within the limits of subculture theory?’ will be tried to be reconsidered and updated with the rapid changes of the 21st century in mind.

Contemporary subculture studies are usually attached to new ways of relating to communities, technology, rapid social and cultural changes in global world and how these changes affect youth’s identity construction or individualisation processes. As I have elaborated on in the previous section, there is a diverse range of theories in youth studies from post-modern subculture theory to more structuralist and orthodox Marxist approaches. Despite the fact that most of the recent studies tend to benefit from postmodern theories in the last decade, it is still possible to trace differences in their approaches to and analyses of the cases they work on. What is common in the recent examples of postmodern subculture studies that I will mention in this section is their emphasis on ‘the way of life’, ‘style’, ‘niche consumption’ and ‘authenticity’. For instance, studies on youth subculture which adopt a postmodern approach mostly deal with ‘Hipster’ as a contemporary subculture of the last decade.

I feel Janna Michael's work titled 'It's Really Not Hip to be a Hipster' (2015) would be a good place to start a survey on recent research as it offers fruitful ways to address the "constant flux and revaluation" in cultural field of youth groups. Furthermore, Michael's (2015) study is influential also due to its attempt at revealing the declining importance of social class in today's urban culture. Based on his analysis which relies on in-depth interviews with young people, he states that

Being an authentic self is not considered self-evident, but instead, getting 'closer to the self' is a central motive in the interviewees' discourse. Romantic and modern notions of authenticity are both employed. While some romantic ideas of authenticity are important in the evaluation of music and fashion, all my interviewees also appreciate experimental culture, embracing diversity in order to express their authentic selves that do not fit any existing categories. Their tolerance towards different taste-schemes in music and fashion with an emphasis on diversity resonates with earlier research on cultural omnivores (Michael, 2015: 177).

On a similar note, Schiermer who also works on hipsters as well, suggests that "traditional subculture vocabulary" ignores the most significant social and cultural changes such as "different relations among generations, new ways of relating to technology and media, new ways of being together, and new phenomenologies and sensibilities". What needs to be done according to Schiermer instead is to discuss hipsters with their "two salient traits... irony and redemptive conservatism". (2014: 168). Analysis of "hipsterism" in Maly and Varis's research has a particular focus on its multi-layered and polycentric structure. According to them hipster culture involves a "complex network of infrastructures" and "very local styles, tastes and attitudes can become fully integrated into and dominant in a global hipster culture and vice versa" (2016: 644). Moreover, they share the same opinions with Schiermer in that they reject the labelling or categorisation of 'hipster'. It is clear that none of the subcultures would like to define themselves with labels or popular signs attached to their identity discourse.

Communities whose members are labelled as hipsters reject the characterisation because of the stereotypical caricature that comes with the label; indeed, the rejection of 'hipster' as an identity category for self-identification seems to be an essential ingredient in the production of 'real' hipsters (Maly and Varis, 2016: 645).

Hipsters are often respected middle or upper middle class, white, young, consumption driven individuals, yet it would be more appropriate to call them "rich

in cultural and educational capital” because “they are seldom part of the super-rich elite, being more routinely described as part of the precariat” (McGuigan 2016 cited in Hubbard, 2016: 3). Furthermore, the argument that claims hipsters are formed only by consumption driven goals becomes highly questionable because of their interest and involvement in the *‘do it yourself’* (from here on DIY) movements, second hand shops and the kitsch and the retro trend. Thus, it could be said that they appreciate non-commercialized as well as ‘low’ cultural products in the same way (Schiermer, 2014: 7). Hence, according to postmodern subculture theory, consumption cannot be reduced to purchasable things, however it should be noted that the capacity to combine the cultural items and turn them into something fashionable requires cultural as well as material capital as Bourdieu has argued (1984). One has to know all cultural symbols to be stylish and authentic.

Looking at the role of cultural capital, knowledge in the fields of fashion and music or ‘knowing what is going on’ allows people to position themselves vis-a`-vis current developments and is therefore of great importance. Mixing styles and avoiding one-dimensionality requires knowledge of styles; one has to master the cultural signs and symbols in order to skilfully play with them and to make them one’s own (Michael, 2015: 177-178).

Therefore, the important point here is having an ability to create a unique style which needs to be updated with cultural knowledge including popular fashion, music, and dance. In this way, young people can make choices by constantly selecting and excluding the elements of these taste forms. But these selection processes or how to define hipsterism could vary locally as Maly and Varis put forth examples from Belgium. According to them, North American hipster culture is almost always coupled with the indie scene whereas in Belgium it is much more difficult to talk of a specific hipster culture, as being ‘non mainstream’ seems to be the primary determinant. In this sense, there is more room for diversity in this loose framing of hipster culture one encounters in Belgium.

Big glasses and skinny jeans are also recognisable hipster indexicals in Belgium. However, we do not find references to vintage sneakers – in fact, wearing Nike sneakers seems to be enough to qualify as a hipster...What is absolutely crucial – and global – in defining a hipster is the claim to authenticity, uniqueness and individuality. Being a true hipster is about ‘being real’, and not ‘trying too hard’. ‘Being real’, however, demands identity work, and being a hipster comes with very strong and reoccurring identity discourses that all focus

on authenticity, yet paradoxically form the basis of a very collective style (Maly and Varis, 2016: 644).

From another perspective, hipster culture is criticized because of its relation to gentrification processes and commodification of hipster culture with cultural icons and specific ethos of consumption. “As to contemporary hipster culture... Hipsters are young, white and middle class, typically between 20 and 35 years old. They contribute to the ‘gentrification’ of former ‘popular’, working-class, ethnic or ‘exotic’ neighbourhoods in the big Western cities” (Schiermer, 2014: 170). Hubbard also agrees on this issue and argues that “consuming hipster stores” require sufficient capital and even consuming spaces make contribute to the gentrification process (2016: 7).

Lately, marketing researches are also interested in youth subculture’s consumption practices such as food, music, and dress preferences. One of the pioneering works among these studies belongs to Arsel and Thompson (2010) who have researched the commodification of hipster subculture and the ways in which they have constituted a niche consumption market. Maly and Varis (2016) supported this view with their following statement;

...post-Fordist era, mass production for all has been replaced by niched mass production catering for the (identity) needs of specific, smaller groups. This niched production does not only sell products, but a mythology in the sense of Barthes (1957), and this can also be in the form of a countercultural identity (Maly and Varis, 2016: 648).

Furthermore, studies on veganism and vegetarianism are popular research topics in this field. For instance, the work of Cherry (2006) scrutinizes the link between veganism and the punk subculture, by giving examples from punk bands and their songs about animal rights and veganism. Similarly, Cronin, McCarthy and Collins’ qualitative analysis demonstrates the role played by food as a resistance to mainstream identity. “We discuss how these strategies are framed by hipsters’ discursive distaste for the commercial food marketing system but are, in practice, operationalised as subtle ways to achieve proper representation of their collective identity within the marketplace” (2014: 2). Even though hipsterism is associated with consuming, the experience of ‘consuming’ takes becomes much more prominent in the process of defining ones identity. According to Kinzey, hipsterism is “the utter fetishization of anything retro” and he argues that this idea of ‘how to

consume the products' bring along an "elitist outlook" which is part of a "dominant mode of marketing" in postmodern capitalism (2012: 26-29). He finds no creativity or originality in hipsters and states that "it's all about sampling, bricolage, remixing, or, usually, just stealing wholesale from the past. They decontextualize and take fashions and ideas from cultures that they have little knowledge of to make their lives into a "work of art.'" (ibid, 2012: 7). I partly agree with this statement but the ambivalence in hipsterism might be the new production in culture. I will discuss this issue in the third chapter of the thesis in detail.

To sum up, over the past century or so, there has been a wide range and multitude of research carried out on youth cultures and subcultures. Furthermore, these studies have been conducted under a variety of schools of thought and perspectives. Theoretically, this thesis feeds from more contemporary approaches to understanding youth cultures – postmodern perspectives in particular. Having said this, I should like to note at this point that earlier theorizations on youth studies, such as the culture industry thesis or variants of cultural studies still become important reference points for my research. What I have chosen to completely omit in this particular study has been theories discussing socio economic features of subculture groups within marketing research. Since my work concentrates on the cultural aspects of youth formations, I have deliberately preferred not to draw on these studies.

3.3 Subculture Studies in Turkey

At first glance at the literature on youth studies in Turkey, there seem to be considerable research carried out on youth and subcultures in Turkey. However, almost all of this research can be formulated as socio-economic and/or marketing oriented. As I have stated above, my interest in youth cultures within the framework of this thesis lies in the sociological and cultural aspects of these cultural formations. In this sense, I can safely state that there are only a handful of studies on youth culture with a broad framework in Turkey. The first of these studies that deserve mentioning is very similar to various research carried out on hipsters which I have mentioned in the previous section of this thesis.

It is about bohemians living in Turkey. The MA thesis of Parmaksızıoğlu, scrutinizes the "Bobos", the bourgeois bohemians and "new status codes that merge bohemianism, sophistication and wealth". She carries out interviews and conducts

participant observation in gentrified neighbourhoods of Istanbul where bobos live and concludes that “the strategies of becoming part of the upper class and distinguishing from other classes have changed. In this respect, it is indicated that creative and intellectual capital is the most important tool of distinction in the contemporary upper class formation” (2009). Likewise, Bulut (2016), in her MA thesis builds an argument on the basis of the recent studies on subculture with a focus of second hand culture in Turkey. She deals with the second hand phenomena considering the formation of social identities and critique of consumer society. Her case study includes a qualitative research based on in depth interviews with second hand shop owners and its customers in Istanbul. She elaborates on consumption of second hand goods and its relation with identities and alternative lifestyles with reference to second hand buyers/sellers in Istanbul and Bourdieu’s concept of collectivity (2016). Another influential study is an MA thesis of Aktas (2012), which focuses on representation of youth subcultures in Turkish humour magazine – Uykusuz and their forms of visibility in public. She claims that subcultures are both subject to mockery and positively represented in popular culture (2012).

One of the most extensive researches on youth culture with highly articulate field work notes belongs to an MA thesis by Tıǧlı (2012). Her work focuses on the Turkish subaltern youth subculture: the apaches and their social, cultural and material circumstances that lead to the formation of this subculture (2012). Another study worth mentioning belongs to Burgan (2012). In resemblance with Tıǧlı’s research on apaches, a subaltern youth subculture in Ankara, Burgan discusses subaltern youth of Izmir concentrating on Kadifekale region in her thesis. She deals with Kadifekale youth as a subaltern subculture within the context of migration and urbanization process in Izmir (2012). The gender issue and global subcultures such as rockers, punks or hipsters are not commonly referred to youth groups in Turkey, yet few exceptions exist such as the MA thesis of Balkan in which the discrimination against transgender people in Istanbul is discussed with case studies from different streets and regions of the city (2016). A similar study belongs to Bayraktaroǧlu (2011) who analyses the formation of punk subculture in Turkey with a more comparative method including the examples of punk subculture from Britain and USA. In her work, she focuses on the social dynamics and

circumstances of 1980s Turkey that have played a role in the emergence of punk culture (2011).

Another issue which is often discussed in recent studies in Turkey is the widespread usage of the Internet and social media among youth. For instance, subculture formation of online gamers is addressed in the MA thesis of Koşu in which he discusses social and cultural characteristics of online role playing gamers (2010). The other study that considers the importance of social media and internet in particular is the research on Geek culture by Şentürk (2017). Her discourse analysis of media texts related with Geek subculture on social media channels aims to scrutinize the construction of Geek identity (2017).

Aside from these studies, most of the analyses tend to focus on the relation between music and youth subcultures in Turkey such as the analysis of rap songs' lyrics (Kır, 2016); ethnographic field study of Rock scene and its subcultural formation in Istanbul (Hakarar, 2016); examination of Turkish hip hop youth subculture in Kreuzberg and how it gradually transformed into a fashion brand although initially being formulated as an opposition to popular culture (Kabas, 2012). On the other hand, there are studies which discuss subcultures with deviance and crime phenomenon as Chicago School scholars. For instance, the effect of drug use in slums and its relation with subculture (Tanaydın, 2017) and socialization process of Gypsy subculture in the context of marginalization of groups in Turkey (Yıldırım, 2015). Finally, it should be noted that Kandiyoti and Saktanber's edited book, *Fragments of Culture: The Everyday of Modern Turkey* includes excellent works for the understanding of cultural fabric and tensions in Turkey, including research on Islamic youth in Turkey.

As I mentioned above, literature on youth studies in Turkey is scarce due to the lack of qualitative research considering sociological and cultural aspects of youth cultures. Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that only a handful of research is carried out on contemporary youth cultures in Turkey. This thesis attempts to contribute to these few studies with its particular focus on Izmir and narratives of young people who portray themselves alternative to mainstream. In this sense, it critically examines the evaluation of emerging contemporary cultural meanings and cultural productions.

CHAPTER IV

UNDERSTANDING YOUTH SUBCULTURES IN IZMIR INSIGHTS FROM A FIELD RESEARCH

Since this study aims to explore the contemporary alternative youth cultures as a new tendency in popular culture, in this chapter I elaborate on this social phenomenon by means of examining the ways in which youth cultural identities and social meanings are constructed in Izmir. I do this by focusing mostly on the everyday life experiences of my participants. In doing this I give special importance to letting them narrate their own stories without imposing on them my own expectations, perceptions and research agendas. After my field research was completed and I ran through the data I had collected, I came to realise that there were a number of prevailing themes that stood out from the interviews and focus group discussions I had conducted. So, I have opted to structure this chapter around these themes. Positioning my data within the theoretical framework I have tried to construct in the past two chapters of this study, in this chapter, I elaborate on my focus group discussions, interviews and participant observations to tease out predominating issues that helped me better understand youth subcultures in Izmir. At the end of the chapter, I engage in a brief discussion on the prominent themes and try to formulate finalising remarks on my analysis.

4.1 A Note on Methodology

Before delving into the analysis of my fieldwork, I feel a brief discussion on my method and approach is in order. In my view, this kind of exploratory research needed loosely formulated research questions to draw a general framework by simply giving insight into what is going on in the field. On the one hand, these research questions were my point of departure when I first started undertaking this research and they sprang from my initial observations with alternative youth when I first started thinking about my research topic. Needless to say, all these preliminary observations have proven quite useful and productive in the course of writing this thesis, as in one way or another they have had an impact on this study, even if indirectly. On the other hand, however, I soon came to realize that they were bringing along potential limitations for the understanding of cultural meanings manifested by alternative youth. By this, I am referring to the ways in which my

pre-determined questions were fixating my focus on particular issues and hindering the free flow of the conversations in the focus groups. Therefore, I decided to leave the course of events in the hands of my interviewees, and our focus group discussions took a form of stream of consciousness, proliferating new concepts through creative debates, illuminating the interests, worries, opinions and feelings of the participants.

In addition to the above mentioned convenience that this approach provided, this particular research path also offered me the flexibility to discover new issues and allowed me to convey thoughts of my interviewees as plainly as possible - which I have found relieving for a few reasons. One reason I found this relieving was because the matter of defining youth cultural identities without adhering to stereotypes and labels was always a concern for me within the context of this study. When I was starting my fieldwork, I had anticipated that my interviewees would refrain from identifying themselves under general labels as 'alternative' or 'marginal'. However to my surprise, I realised that they were not uncomfortable with defining themselves as 'alternative' and/or 'different' when asked to reflect on their opinions about contemporary subcultures. But I also realised that these labels were not confining but rather quite broad and general. They refused to make categorisations and argued that it was not possible to think of strictly defined subcultures with distinctive styles and political ideologies as the case might have been a few decades ago. This was an idea that I had been feeling very positively about since I had started engaging with the literature on youth and subcultures.

A second point of relief I experienced through the free flow of discussions among the participants of this research was when it became clear that issues raised in general by my interviewees during the focus groups had considerable points of intersection with my initial research questions. Their characteristics, semiotic resources and common patterns associated with 'alternativeness', consumption practices, leisure activities and popular culture within the context of living in Turkey were expressed clearly in lively discussions. I want to clarify that semiotic resources are used in a broad sense in this study which allow for different combinations and plurality of meanings.

Thirdly, the focus groups ended up evolving into conversations that were led by the participants themselves. No matter how much I tried to structure the

discussions around my preliminary questions (this was something I tried to do initially, but jettisoned soon after) my participants took the lead and themes that they felt were important became discussed repetitively. This in turn, enabled some themes to start coming to the forefront, without my interference and this gave new perspectives and directions for the progress of this study. I conducted three focus group interviews with ‘alternative’ youth groups, where each group consisted of 5-8 people. The total number of young individuals I have interviewed this way was 18. Furthermore, I have conducted five in-depth interviews with the owners/workers of the places where young people enjoy spending time together. All interviews were recorded by courtesy of participants and transcribed later.

4.2 Labels and Categories: How to Define the Alternative Youth of Izmir

Before I began this research, my interest was the hipster subculture in Turkey, because I was quite intrigued with both the increased visibility of these young people on streets of the city I was living in, and their representations in mainstream media in Turkey. I had found these young individuals very interesting particularly because their visibility and popularity in mainstream media and popular culture were proliferating day by day despite their desires to not be included into these spheres of mainstream society. While I am aware that their visibility is still a subject of mockery, a time has come today that it is not exceptional anymore to encounter representations of hipsters in mainstream media along with more alternative channels in Turkey.

However, as my research evolved, I felt that it was important to prioritise their own life experiences, everyday cultures and meaning-creation processes through their own narratives, rather than relying on their representations in various forms of mass media. Hence, in this thesis, I have opted to leave aside their representations in media and focus on giving voice to their own experiences. This however did not prove enough to allow me to engage with my participants without any restriction. I soon came to realise that how to label them, or how to categorize them, what to refer to them stood out as major issues. Although I was developing concerns with regards to homogenising descriptions of alternative young people, when I started spending time with the participants of this study, it became much clearer that they were being categorised under homogenising stereotypes and labels despite their individualistic self identifications.

However, their individualistic search for authenticity and originality and attempts to disassociate themselves from any boundaries, categorisations or style icons are the most common features of hipsters. Michael (2015) who conducted a research on hipsters also shared her opinions in the same way. According to her, hipsters tend to abstain from following trends or any component of popular styles yet try to stand out with unusual tastes, styles and individualistic expressions. The categorization of ‘hipster’, which constitutes general rules in order to characterize a homogenous subculture group with fixed stereotypical semiotic codes does not encompass every young person that fits the physical description of a ‘hipster’. Instead, what I have come to realise is that a much more multilayered set of cultural meanings are engaged in the processes of identity construction among youth. This issue is discussed in Maly and Varis’s (2016) research as follows,

The fact that hipsters and (certain) hipster indexicals have global purchase should not be mistaken to mean that hipster culture is a homogeneous globalised subculture... We have established so far that the hipster culture is a layered and polycentric translocal culture. Some of its identity markers are truly global, others very local; some very hard to acquire and establish, others relatively cheap (such as buying one’s identity at *American Apparel*). What is absolutely crucial – and global – in defining a hipster is the claim to authenticity, uniqueness and individuality. (Maly and Varis, 2016: 642; 644)

Therefore, in my view, this situation presented itself as a major concern that needed to be tackled and led me to rethink the concept of subculture. The issue of labelling these young people, particularly with the widely accepted false expectation that subcultures are made up of homogeneous group structures was highly problematic.

As I have examined in previous chapters in detail, the rapidly changing nature of the global world along with a wide array of media messages consumed via the Internet, especially through social media channels among youth, make it difficult to assert clearly defined categorisations and group formations. Hence, I have opted to adopt the concept of ‘alternative’ youth as my terminology to ensure a more inclusive outlook for contemporary youth identities in Izmir. I was further convinced that this was a proper umbrella term to use when it was also uttered by more than one of my interviewees when we were discussing the existence of subculture groups in Turkey. For instance Ege, a 23 years old male respondent stated in a focus group environment as follows; “*There is no such thing as*

subculture in Turkey. We just refer to all of them as 'alternative'” (Ege, age 23). During the focus group discussions, I came to realize that they are more comfortable with this specific word as Ege, because they positively embraced the connotations of ‘alternative’ which enable them to attribute different meanings into a single word without any limitations. I wanted to give them voice and a platform to express their opinions and feelings so I used this term based upon their own self narrations. Therefore, they were not annoyed by the word ‘alternative youth’ which otherwise could have sounded like creating a new homogenous category for them. Interestingly, I thought that these specific word choices that they unconsciously uttered for self description such as ‘alternative’, ‘different’, ‘authentic’, ‘original’, and ‘unique’ both illuminated what is most appreciated by ‘hipsters’ or ‘alternative youth cultures’ as a contemporary subculture and why they are so uncomfortable with the labelling issue.

What I observed during the focus group discussions is that these young individuals hold a negative attitude not only towards categorisations but also towards popular culture trends and products. According to them, popular culture invoked the lack of creativity and originality, and labelling them with categories implied the loss of authenticity so that they rejected to associate themselves with any group formation, which could make them ‘ordinary’ or ‘mainstream’. Furthermore, when I addressed questions on subcultures, they argued that the concept of subculture is out of date and refused the existence of contemporary subcultures, hence their opinions reinforced my argument that it is not possible to define and describe contemporary cultural identities with homogenous structures. For instance, Can (age 23) asked me sneeringly *“Is there still such a thing as subculture? I do not think so.”* Similarly, Arya (age 18) expressed that *“People who think that they are members of subcultures do not have the power to transform their music style into a whole way of life in Turkey. So subculture becomes nothing more than what you listen to”*.

These expressions refer to a pattern in which young people tend to reject the idea of subculture as an identity category and prefer to adopt a more general term. It is my contention that there was a possibility that their pejorative and degrading misrepresentations in popular culture from social media caps to TV series might have had a negative effect over their relation to hipster categorisation since they

had a strong interest in authenticity and uniqueness. It has been widely accepted that ‘alternative’ or ‘marginal’ styles are only celebrated in the art world and fashion industry. As Hebdige articulates, “style in particular provokes a double response: it is alternatively celebrated (in the fashion page) and ridiculed or reviled (in those articles which define subcultures as social problems) (2002: 93). For instance, as a researcher who seems to stand closer to the negative pole of these double responses, Kinzey (2012) interprets hipster’s interest in uniqueness and authenticity pejoratively and associates their attempt with pastiche, mass production and banality.

This need for uniqueness and pure authenticity usually has the peculiar effect of making their “aesthetic lives” into something like a postcard of Andy Warhol’s Campbell Soup Cans: a copy of a copy, mass-produced and unoriginal. In their attempt to achieve absolute individuality, hipsters somehow overlook the fact that they are doing the exact same thing in the same exact ways as everyone around them (Kinzey, 2012: 7).

However, I am not convinced with this argument with regards to the disappearance of authenticity. My field research has shown me over and over again that authenticity is still a relevant and crucial concept for young individuals’ identity construction process, despite the fact that it may manifest itself in different forms such as the celebration of irony in cultural products, new ways of being together, new ways of relating to technology, media and the past (Schiermer, 2014), DIY activism, urban improvement (Hubbard, 2016). For instance, contrary to this negative evaluation, young individuals that I interviewed had different opinions and interpretations about being different or alternative.

The meanings that they seemed to attach to the word ‘alternative’ - which are also specified by themselves - such as ‘non-mainstream’, ‘different’, ‘authentic’ and ‘original’ are all positively signified in their minds. As one of my respondents stated in an interview, *“I definitely define myself as ‘different’ because the culture that I live in is not my culture. I am different but this does not make me good or bad. But people in Turkey are mean and ugly. I am not one of them”* (Deniz, age 24). On a similar note, another participant I have interviewed suggested as follows: *“I am alternative and I am not doing this on purpose but I like to be original. Honestly, I do not want to read the same books or watch the same movies with ordinary people. People are ignorant and disrespectful in Turkey. They only read silly books or read*

articles from social media. I cannot enjoy the same things they do. They think that they are thinking just by 'scrolling' on facebook" (Su, age 25).

As can be clearly observed from the words of these two young individuals, they position themselves as different and alternative to values and beliefs of the mainstream society. It is important to note here that on the one hand, they described their difference through positive signifiers such as original, intellectual, and different, on the other hand, their 'alternativeness' arises from the meanings that are created through taking a stance against the mainstream society and its culture. These young people's self-expression on the basis of difference entails the common belief of their unconformity with the dominant culture of Turkey. At this point, I should like to clarify that their sense of not belonging to the majority is not escalated due to their hatred toward these common cultural practices. Rather they simply emphasized that their different style, leisure activities, intellectual capacity and cultural capital make them 'marginal'.

As a concluding remark on this issue of labelling and/or categorizing the participants of this study, I feel that as a researcher I needed to follow a middle course. On the one hand, I am aware that categorizations and labelling tend to lead to homogenising and stereotyping discourses with regards to the young people involved in my research. But on the other hand, I have also come to understand the importance and necessity of classifications and tags for the sake of meaningful analysis of the daily life practices of my participants. As a compromise, I choose to avoid using specific labels such as 'hipsters', and opted to rely on the concepts and categories my participants used themselves.

4.2.1 Marginality and Discrimination: Constructing the 'Self' and the 'Other'

It seemed at first that 'marginal' might have been an accurate terminology to label the participants of this study. Particularly when we deploy this term with reference to positive meanings such as creativity, genuineness and originality. However, I have had to refrain from doing this throughout this thesis because it has negative connotations in Turkish context and it is widely used to refer to those who create disorder and factions in the society. When this issue came up among my participants however, they felt that they were the ones who felt like an outsider and discriminated. They have mentioned on numerous occasions that they had become victims of hate speech in society due to their 'difference' and 'marginality'. The

most common problem they complain about is how they are faced with discrimination and harassment among ‘majority’ because of their different looks and style. *“One day I was in the bus, a guy just looked at me and said fuck off, grumbling about my outlook”* (Berk, age 20). Although, I did not plan to open a subject related with discrimination or have any preliminary questions on this topic, the participants themselves were enthusiastic about changing the direction of the discussions and most of them wanted to share a harassment story similar to each other.

In fact, what was striking for me was that while all narratives of discrimination and harassment were different from one another, on another level they all seemed to have their commonalities. These young people were being harassed, judged and looked upon condescendingly not for their actions or for any actual disturbance they created or because of any illegal acts, but simply for their ‘otherness’ which seemed to stem from their clothes, styles, values and tastes. What Derin stated in an interview for instance was very similar to what I heard from most of my other respondents, *“when we go out for fun, people stare at us as if we were aliens or as if we were naked. We are facing this discrimination just because of our different style. That is why I do not prefer to go to free concerts or cultural activities because other people make me uncomfortable”* (Derin, age 22). On a similar note, Berk, another respondent stated his discomfort in his following words, *“I am a youtuber and have a fashion channel. I always feel that the majority does not have any respect for my job. I usually received inappropriate and sometimes harassing comments for my videos. They do not have any aesthetical perception. I wish I was not born here”* (Berk, age 20).

While how they come to feel as an ‘outsider’ might vary, it is clear that these harassment experiences drive them to take a negative stance against the majority. Therefore, they explicitly stated that they neither wanted to get in touch with the mainstream society nor their cultural practices. It would not be unreasonable to suggest then, that their cultural identities are constructed through the rejection or denial of the dominant values, norms and beliefs of the society. By saying this, I do not want to assert that identities are constructed only through what is outside of one’s own self or what is lacking in one’s own self, but rather I want to point out that identities should be considered within power relations and through their

relation to the 'other'. When expressing themselves, young individuals usually made reference to the other. More precisely to the daily practices that are undertaken by those they define as the 'other'. In this sense, they defined/positioned themselves, their tastes, discourses, cultural practices in contrasting comparisons to those they defined as the 'other'. Therefore, I feel confident to argue that the meanings they attribute to the 'other' plays a crucial role in the identity construction processes of young 'alternative' individuals. They often revisited this subject while they were talking about the importance of style and sphere of leisure in their expressions of themselves and relationships with their peers. In this respect, their otherisation and discrimination takes on a productive form in the processes of their self-identifications.

To sum up, all meanings that had an influence on their world views showed a great variety. Furthermore, I would argue that their disapproval of the majority's rules and culture actually has been transformed into a creative and fruitful meaning making process in their everyday lives with new cultural forms and practices. Thus, as Hall argues it is not possible to talk of unified and stable identities in contemporary social and cultural spheres, but rather that they are more likely "...increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation" (1996: 4).

4.3 Leisure Activities, Cultural Formations and the Social Construction of Meaning

Throughout my field research, one of the things that was quite striking for me was the ways in which my participants deployed a wide range of semiotic forms to better define themselves, to distinguish themselves from the majority and to give meaning to both the cultural artefacts they use but also to their social worlds in general. I should like to clarify at this point that semiotic resources are used in a broad sense in this study which allow for different combinations, new significations as well as signs. Van Leeuwen argues that "Semiotic resources are not restricted to speech and writing and picture making. Almost everything we do or make can be done or made in different ways and therefore allows, at least in principle, the

articulation of different social and cultural meanings” (2005: 3-4). Similarly, Hebdige introduced semiotics to discuss youth cultures with a textual analysis of styles of subcultures (1979). Accordingly, I argue in my work that various forms of signs and signifiers are deployed in abundance by these young people in their attempts to give meaning to the world around them, to create new cultural forms and to influence and shape their leisure activities in general.

4.3.1 The Precursors of Being Cool: Style, Cultural Capital and Intellectual Background

Even though the term alternative youth may resonate as a specific set of collective behaviours or accepted norms among these young people, individuality and self interest are fundamental sentiments in their identity formations. Their opinions, emotions, body language and style demonstrate different aspects of meaning-making processes. For instance, ‘being cool’ is a must for all participants and is identified with individuality and authenticity. They explicitly stated that they were cool because of their distinct style and opinions.

When elaborating on this idea of coolness, what constantly came up in my interviews was the emphasis on style. My participants tended to feel that style was what made them who they were. When asked about how they would define themselves, instead of referring to biological differences and ascribed roles they constantly underlined the central role of style and leisure in their life. *“I am nothing without my outfit, my hobbies, cultural activities that I enjoy. I would feel empty”* (Su, age 25). Therefore, throughout my fieldwork I came to realise that my participants used the notion of ‘style’ as an umbrella term to explain not only their outlook, but also all artistic expressions revealing their social, political and cultural background. In the words of these young people, style is meant to be much more than simply wearing unusual dresses or having an interesting hairstyle but an inclusive term to confirm and prove their coolness among peers. *“I think, people who have different opinions and artistic talents such as music, painting or writing are cool. But their style, interests and hobbies should match each other. For instance, I want to guess what they like from their appearance but also their manner of speaking, posture, behaviours are equally important for me.”* (Selin, age 23). We can see in Selin’s words the importance she gave to a holistic perception when observing other people.

While this holistic perception seems to be a prevalent theme among many of these young people when they talk about coolness, I have also come across an emphasis in their discussions on a significant trait that they think a cool young individual ought to possess. Thornton (1996) refers to this in her study about acid-house subculture as 'not trying hard'. According to her, there is nothing harmful to the cultural and subcultural capital as much as trying too hard.

Nothing depletes capital more than the sight of someone trying too hard. For example, fledgeling clubbers of fifteen or sixteen wishing to get into what they perceive as a sophisticated dance club will often reveal their inexperience by over-dressing or confusing 'coolness' with an exaggerated cold blank stare" (Thornton, 1996: 27).

In a similar way, Su, a 25 years old young woman who contributed to this study supported Thornton's argument with her own words, "*Cool means "effortlessly sexy" for me. You cannot be cool just because you want to be cool"* (Su, age 25). While the two respondents, Selin and Su, were not saying the same thing, or even seemed to be talking about different topics, the similarity in their emphasis on what makes someone cool was striking. Another striking realisation for me with regards to this conversation about 'coolness' has been that in spite of their differences of opinion on the conditions and rules of being cool, all my interviewees have highly emphasized its importance over and over again during our conversations. In fact, when we further discussed the notion of being cool among my interviewees, some of the participants considered the 'original style' as a pre-condition of being cool. For instance, Tolga's (age 20) definition of cool which was "*People who have originality in their style are cool"* summarised the sentimental values that young individuals had in Izmir.



Image 1. A participant with an alternative style

Almost as a prerequisite to having one's own style, what almost all my interviewees made reference to was cultural capital and intellectual background. Even in the early stages of my research, when I had only met a handful of my participants, I had come to realise that intellectual background was one of the most prominent feature for alternative youth because meaning making processes are subject to individuals and every individual has the potential to determine and change the semiotic meanings in their styles. For instance, all my participants came to an agreement that not every individual can have her/his unique style or leisure activities, yet the meanings they attribute to their styles or hobbies could vary depending on their cultural and intellectual capital. Deniz, one of my interviewees makes reference to this argument through the example of tattoos for instance; *"it is very common to see the exact same tattoo you have on someone else, but I do not care, because I am the one who determines the meaning of that tattoo. However, if I see the same tattoo on someone whose style I do not like, I might be irritated. But even then I would probably think that it looks better on me"* (Deniz, age 24). On a similar note, another respondent stated; *"I think most of the people want to have a tattoo that nobody has but if it carries a meaning for you, what difference does it make."* (Can, age 23).



Image 2. A participant with an alternative style

Although I strictly refrained from guiding or influencing my participants in my interviews or focus group discussions, I soon realised that my participants all had a similar take on the concept of ‘style’. When we first started talking of style in our conversations, they all came up with ideas related to fashion and music. However, after a while it became clear that the word ‘style’ beared a transcendent meaning for alternative youth, and that a variety of cultural meanings and connotations were attached to this single word. For instance, as one of my interviewees mentioned in a focus group discussion, “*style reminds me of a kind of dress, shoes, hair style etc. someone has and how s/he combines these items. But actually all of them signify something. For example, what kinds of books, tv series or music they like*” (Deniz, age 24).

Similarly, another male respondent in the same focus group emphasized the transcendent and sophisticated connotations attached to the word ‘style’ by making reference to how style should be created through a conscious choice but not accidentally; *“Sometimes people do not know the meaning of what they wear and this never makes them stylish. If you listen to Turkish folk music but look like a punker, you are a fake punker, and this can be understood easily”* (Tuna, age 23)



Image 3. An indifferently cool alternative young individual



Image 4. A scene from an alternative DIY exhibition



Image 5. A scene from an alternative DIY exhibition

Therefore, both the focus group discussions and in depth interviews persuaded me to think that style is meant as more than simply the outlook of young people. It would be more relevant to consider style in a broader sense including all daily life activities and cultural aspects of lifestyle. My participant observations and focus group discussions have shown me that these young people are concerned with neither mere resistance nor consumption. What they seem to be doing is creating their own subcultures and/or subcultural spheres through navigating, collecting, combining and even cannibalising many different styles and cultural forms. In this

respect, I find Böse's (2003) "style surfing" term useful to discuss how social and cultural practices are in a constant state of flux in the context of subcultural formations.

Opposed to the 1970s, the 1980s and 1990s have been described as post-modern 'decades of subcultural fragmentation and proliferation, with a glut of revivals, hybrids and transformations, and the coexistence of myriad styles at any one point in time' where individualistic subculturalists 'move quickly and freely from one style to another as they wish', a practice referred to as 'style surfing'"(Böse, 2003: 169).

In my field research, I realised that what Böse refers to as "style surfing" was highly evident among my young interviewees in Izmir. In fact, it became an enlightening revelation for me, concerning the alternative youth culture in Izmir, to see that it was their blurred and fluid tastes that gave these young people the freedom to choose from a variety of styles and cultural spheres, which in turn enabled them to foster new semiotic combinations through processes of bricolage. Therefore, it could be argued that young people who define themselves alternative to mainstream share cultural meanings in their style. It is important to note that there are no agreed upon homogeneous tastes that stand out as transcendent unifiers. Their style is not distinctive and special to one group yet there are things that more or less every alternative young person likes. Therefore, it is often possible to come across same style clothes, hairstyles, moustache, use of language, and 'cool' manners etc.



Image 6. A scene from an alternative DIY exhibition

To sum up, style seems to be one of the most important elements that my participants use in their self definitions and processes of identity construction. What I feel needs to be reminded once again however is that they employ this concept of style in a very broad sense. It does not refer only to their ways of dressing, or hairstyles, or fashion, or even the kinds of music they listen to. Style in their understanding includes all of these but also encompasses almost the whole of their everyday practices, leisure activities and the ways in which they engage with the social world.

4.3.2 The Sphere of Leisure: Where the Unexpected Comes to Life

Social and cultural meanings related to both being cool or alternative to mainstream are coupled with cultural practices of youth in the sphere of leisure. As far as I observed from focus group interviews and the participant observation notes, this sphere of leisure involves their leisure activities, field of interests, use of language, engagements with social media, and consumption practices that allow for new combinations, hybrid and mixed styles and lead to the emergence of social and cultural codes among them. I would argue that as active consumers/users, these young people reinvent the meanings of the spaces and cultural artefacts they consume. When they shop from flea markets, or when they consume nostalgic spaces, cultures and food, through the ways they load meanings on them, they are actually forging new hybrid and original cultural forms. This becomes a process through which unprecedented meanings, values and connotations are attached to culture at large. Furthermore, since the majority of the society is not familiar with these new cultural meanings, this new culture becomes *their* culture, or the culture of the alternative youth. Hence, even if they do not do it intentionally, through the formulation of their own subcultures they end up avoiding the mainstream cultural spheres where they feel otherised.

Hence, while the young participants of this study are following the latest trends to create and shape their styles and tastes, they are also continuously making changes in their cultural practices to flourish and emphasize their 'difference' and 'alternativeness'. As I have mentioned in the earlier chapters of this thesis, contemporary youth cultures are comprised of postmodern identities with fluid and hybrid characteristics. In this sense, we need to see them as being in a state of constant flux. In the words of one of my respondents, this fluidity and fluctuating

state of being was explained as follows: *“My tastes can change very quickly but people do not understand this. What kind of books, movies or music I like can change in just a few days because what triggers changes in ones opinion is awareness, not age” (Efe, age 22).*

In his article on subcultural styles, Clarke places emphasis on the ‘sphere of leisure’ because according to him, leisure is the area of choices where styles as well as class relations are the most visible. In his words, despite the fact that leisure allowed “relative freedom” with “symbolic activities” and provided for a “displacement of central class concerns and values”, still leisure was highly affected by the financial capacity. (2006: 147-148). It has become my general view throughout my fieldwork that while cultural capital is an integral part of the leisure activities or styles of my participants, it is not the sole form of experience. Rather, the sphere of leisure also contains elements that require financial capital apart from cultural capital. For example, it became evident in our discussions that all off my participants had been abroad at least once. I believe even this is an indicator of the existence of financial capital within the context of Turkish economy. Furthermore, they explicitly stated that they do not have any financial difficulties or have a relatively comfortable lifestyle with very little financial constraints. *“I think we live a comfortable life. Sometimes I have financial problems but my overspending for alcohol or weed is the only reason” (Efe, age 22).* In this sense, I believe it would be safe to suggest that being financially well off, or living at least an upper middle class life is almost a prerequisite for being an alternative young person in Turkey. In fact, my participant observation supports this as when I went to cafes, bars and shops known as ‘cool’ and ‘hip’ where alternative youth hangs out, I saw that most of the places were quite expensive and consumption oriented enterprises.

Despite the fact that the primary defining aspect of alternative youth cultures might specifically be their ‘alternativeness’, I believe it is possible to argue that this cultural form is turning into a ‘product’ and that these young people are unintentionally becoming a part of the vicious circle of the culture industry that they have such a distaste for. One of the first second hand shoppers in Izmir addressed this issue in our interview as follows; *“When I first opened this shop, there was nothing in this neighbourhood. Then, second hand, vintage shops started popping up, few new third wave coffee shops, nostalgic cafes selling gazoz (traditional*

Turkish soda) appeared and, some so called entrepreneurs who have no idea about the mentality of these shops began to copy what they saw. Now, all cafes and shops are the same. There is no creativity or authenticity. Besides, they are the reason for excessive prices in our business” (Levent, age 32).

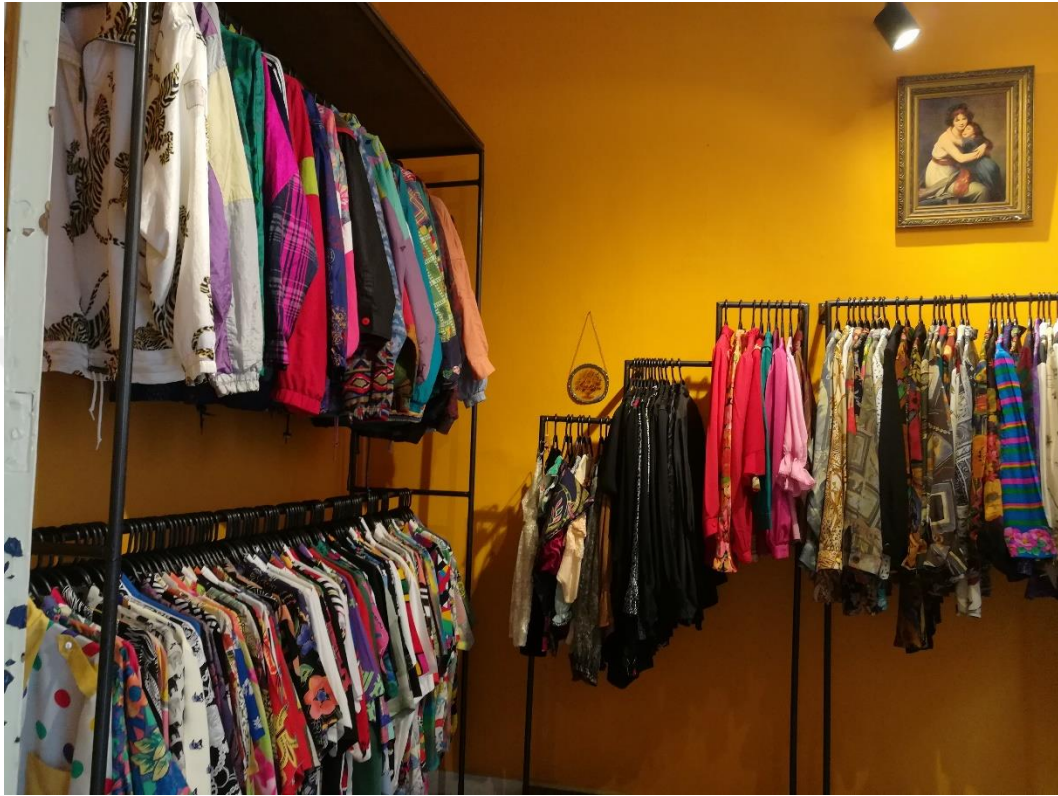


Image 7*. A shot from the interior of a second hand shop in Alsancak



Image 8* A shot of an alternative café in Alsancak



Image 9. A shot of an alternative coffee shop in Alsancak

A very similar complaint is uttered by another café owner whose café is popular among ‘alternative’ youth. *“I always aim to create a cultural sphere for youth with independent artists’ concerts, art exhibitions, film screenings and try to do this without any commercial concern but I observe that other café owners take the advantage of this idea of ‘cultural café’ and turn it into a completely different concept with capitalistic rationality” (Emre, age 36).*

These two similar expressions showed that, on the one hand, changes in the sphere of leisure have a driving force for the urban transformation in Izmir, offering new spaces and opportunities for the identity construction processes of youth. On the other hand, it is possible to encounter places which have lost their potential to create cultural fields for youth as Emre mentioned before and, which have merely turned into a profit seeking business.



Image 10. A graffiti art across an alternative coffee shop

It is my contention that niche consumption practices and cultural commodities of alternative young individuals enable them to form new ways of sociality, new ways of artistic expressions, and new ways of cultural codes among them. However, these consumption practices and ironic ways of expressions in the sphere of leisure require at least being financially well off alongside education, intellectuality and, stylistic acquisitions. Hence, I argue that there are traces of social class among alternative youth in Izmir. These niche consumption practices and cultural commodities are crucial for youth’s self-expression and construction of

individuality and as Hebdige points out “It is basically the way in which commodities are used in subculture which mark the subculture off from more orthodox cultural formations” (2002: 103) and cultural meanings could be used for their authenticity.



Image 11. A shot of the interior design of an alternative bar



Image 12. A shot of the interior design of an alternative bar

As I have discussed in the second chapter, postmodern approach adopts a relatively positive stance to culture industry in subcultural studies. For instance, Bennett claims that not all subcultural activities demand high levels of income but encompass leisure activities without any material consumption (2005: 2). Yet I am not convinced that structural determinants such as class, race or gender have completely disappeared - particularly within the context of 'alternative' youth in Izmir since their leisure activities revolve around consumption related practices. However, what needs to be kept in mind is that these niche consumption practices and cultural commodities might be interpreted as a new means of expression. In other words, this bricolage culture with ironic ways of expression and specific cultural meanings may be considered as a new creative way of production in culture which confirm and reinforce the originality of alternative young people. In this sense, one can claim that in the cultural practices of these young people there are manifestations of different forms of subversions-from-within. While through niche consumption they become an integral part of the culture industry, through the ways in which they consume or make use of cultural artefacts they foster unprecedented creative cultural forms.

4.3.3 Vintage, Second-Hand, Kitsch: Retro is the New Black

In April 2018, I had the chance to attend one of the festivals in Izmir that is predominantly celebrated by alternative youth. I should like to allocate some space here to elaborate on this festival as I feel that many insights can be reached through a detailed look at the ways in which these young people celebrate and enjoy such festivities. The festival was named '*The Epic Fair*' and it took place in the old historical park of Izmir, called Kültür Park. This year, the third of the festival was organized by Pübliko. It was the first time that *Epic Fair* hosted international music bands besides independent Turkish bands and singers. I was particularly enthusiastic to participate in this festival because it contains many elements from alternative youth cultures and has the potential to carry meanings and points of views from these young people's lives. The slogan of the festival was '*Kendine Has*' – a phrase that translates into English roughly as *inherently unique*. This is also a phrase that has almost become a motto among alternative young individuals in their self-definitions. These young people give special importance to the motto of 'be yourself' and 'be original' which for them pave the way towards being cool.



Image 13. A photo from Epic Fair Festival

I spent a whole day and a night in the festival space and attended almost all of the concerts and organizations. I should note that both the admission ticket as well as the snacks and beverages were quite expensive for a one-day festival, which I think strengthens my argument on the capitalistic nature and class specificity of alternative youth cultures in Izmir. As I was listening to the bands, talking with people, strolling around the festival area and participating in various festivities, I was struck by the ways in which the content and the aura of the festival fostered creative collages of various cultural forms – particularly from the past and the present. *The Epic Fair* festival transformed the pejorative ‘old school’ and traditional but nostalgic image of K lt r Park into something ‘vintage’ and ‘cool’ just like the popularity of second hand shops or 80s’ blouses with shoulder pads and mom’s jeans. Cultural meanings created through the mixing of symbols and products from the past with contemporary cultural practices, values and meanings produce new cultural products and meanings with their authentic cultural depth. For instance, some of the singers/bands had organized their performances like old/historic pavilion artists, while at the same time exhibiting their difference/distinctness from times of the past. For instance, there were electronic covers of old Turkish songs, which are notably popular among alternative youth today. Similarly, plenty of new bands and singers performed, doing experimental

music with mixed elements from the past and the present. Meanwhile I feel obliged to mention that I had the chance to listen to music bands which are considered a part of new indie music movement in Turkey called '*third new wave*' with poem style long lyrics but without having aesthetic concerns in a literary sense. Actually, these absurd lyrics have many common points with *indifferently cool* (a phrase I will elaborate on in detail in the coming section of this chapter) youth's thinking habits and in some way representation of their everyday life practices. As Frith argues, "Music, like identity, is both performance and story, describes the social in the individual and the individual in the social, the mind in the body and the body in the mind..." (1996: 109).



Image 14*. A photo from Epic Fair Festival



Image 15. Records of Turkish new third wave music genre

This emergence of new music genres, specific leisure activities and consumption practices of these young people are all reflections of the bricolage culture they created. In fact, the emphasis on this bricole culture is so prevalent that it has become an integral part of the neoliberal politics and transformations on space and the city in general. Proliferation of new third wave coffee shops, vegan/vegetarian cafes which love to serve ‘mom’s olive oil dishes’, second hand shops, bars and streets where alternative youth hang out are all examples of this ongoing change. In this respect, The Epic Fest was like a carnivalesque reflection of this cultural bricolage that seem to be at the heart of alternative youth cultures. One of the organizers of the festival who also owned a ‘cool’ as well as popular bar among alternative youth shared his opinions about this urban transformation.

“I had always dreamed of organizing a music festival and I had set my mind on doing this in Kültür Park. Because it was like a Central Park with a beautiful atmosphere, yet no one had appreciated its value. We went to all official institutions for a permission to arrange the festival but they did not support us, hence we launched a social media campaign and invited everyone to gather at Kültürpark. I believe that we were successful to create an awareness. Later on, there even emerged an academic publication. Then I managed to make friendship with the owners of the pavilions and they complied with renting their places which actually served them in good stead because they moved up to the social ladder from cheap

and cheesy weddings to trendy and stylish weddings” (Arda, age 36). As Arda expressed, organizations like The Epic Fest had an influence on the cultural side of this transformation. It could be said that, Kültürpark gained a brand new ‘hip’ identity among alternative young people but also increased its visibility and popularity among local community.



Image 16. A photo from Epic Fair Festival



Image 17*. A photo from Epic Fair Festival

I should like to note here that this mixing of the past and the present is not something confined to the festival. As I mentioned before, authenticity is an important tool in youth's identity construction process but it also refers to "the recreation or revival of objects and motifs from the past" (Jenß, 2004: 387-388). Thus, regarding their style, it is not wrong to claim that the common feature of these young people was their love of nostalgia and their 'ironic' way of expressing this admiration. Correspondingly, it was not surprising that both my participant observations and focus group interviews showed that young individuals take an eager interest in vintage and retro culture. I am convinced that vintage and retro clothes, accessories, and commodities related to their hobbies are fairly appreciated among alternative youth but there is no stereotype that dictates how their style has to be. Rather this fluidity of wide range of options allow them to create more creative meanings. In this respect, every individual could make her/his own bricolage with gathering different pieces together to be authentic and this flexibility also strengthens their self esteem and minimizes exclusion among them.



Image 18. Second hand clothes showcased on an outdoor stand

For example, Dođa (age, 19) articulates how she used to frequent second hand shops and flea markets because of her obsession with the vintage stuff and rare items *“I found one of the most beautiful leather jackets in the flea market. It had a spirit. Besides, it was extremely cheap. I think it is original because I have not seen it on anybody but me”* When recycling of vintage/retro cultural artefacts become a prominent way of expressing authenticity, one can argue there is no limit for kitsch and bad taste in alternative youth’s style because it reinforces their uniqueness and makes them more original. As Sontag has eloquently articulated on the perspective of unnatural, artificial and exaggerated sensibilities in her famous essay titled Notes on Camp (1966), and as McRobbie has shown how popular culture products might be good because they are simply awful (McRobbie, 2005: 18), the young people of this study also tend to use the same sensibilities to create an authentic and unique self.



Image 19*. A shot from the interior of a second hand shop in Alsancak



Image 20. An example of an alternative style

These sensibilities also manifest themselves in all forms of cultural artefacts they produce, including fanzines, blogs, music, song lyrics, poems, comments on social media and other forms of creative productions. For example, one of my participants had a blog called '*bad combination*' full of her clothing combinations with quirky poses. Below are some exemplory pages from a fanzine a participant of this study is publishing.

yaşamak çok güzel
ama keşke daha çok ölsek

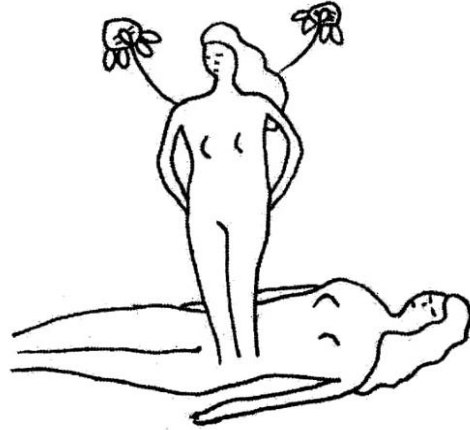


Image 21. A page from a participant's fanzine

ultrason on defalarca
yağla beni
bebek daha az zarar görsün diye
ama gördüğün
gitmeyecek
kistten öteye

ça va



Image 22. A page from a participant's fanzine



Image 23. A photo from Epic Fair Festival



Image 24. A shot from an art exhibition

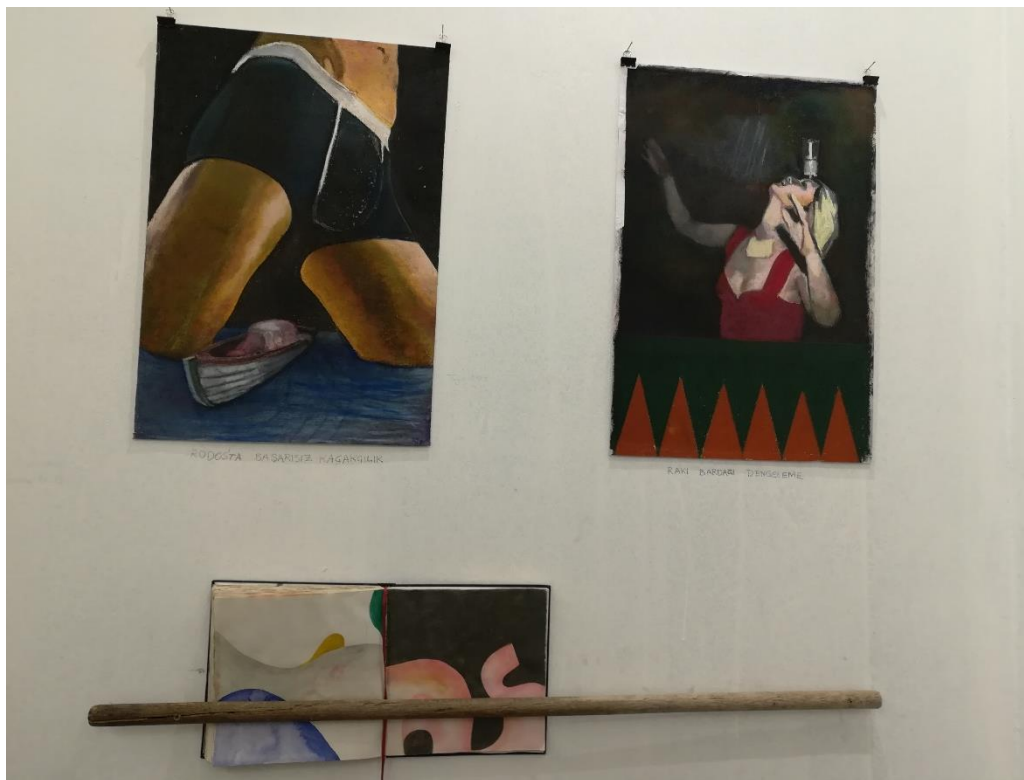


Image 25*. A shot from an art exhibition

As I have quoted from Dođa above, who uttered her impressions on flea market, almost all of the young people in my focus groups expressed the importance of originality in style repeatedly, which they thought could be attained from second hand or vintage products. I could say that their admiration of second hand and vintage shops, and popularity of 80s and 90s items are an indispensable part of their lives. Some of the respondents connected the popularity of vintage and retro with the proliferation of social media. *“In the past, people were making fun of me but now at least they are used to seeing different styles thanks to social media. I love wearing 80s clothes and have received many compliments on social media. But global brands are also turning their faces to vintage and retro styles so most of the items can be found in popular shops in malls now”* (Arya, age 18). In addition to this, Arya also added that some of the global brands began to make vintage fashion collections, which reduced the authenticity of their styles. She stated that she was not happy with this. In this sense, it is not surprising to encounter exaggerated clothing, hair and make-up styles, which has almost no end for new creations. As Arya mentioned, even global brands have adopted vintage nostalgia and it is getting harder to make original and unique combinations. It is my contention that, at this point, their creativity has considerably enhanced without boundaries.

4.4 The Impact of Politics on Everyday Life

In addition to kitsch, bad taste and exaggeration, being *indifferently cool* or portraying indifferently cool attitudes also stood out in all my interviews with my participants as a prominent feature of fulfilling their sensibilities towards alternativeness and coolness. This notion of being *indifferently cool* is quite abstract and difficult to explain, as it has no tangible features. What is meant by this in general is a set of attitudes or behaviours towards life and society that marks the indifferently cool individual as appearing not concerned or interested but at the same time attendant to all. I have come to realise in all my interviews and participant observations *indifferently cool* manners play a key role in the ways in which these alternative young individuals express their identities. I have felt this so much, that I can argue that being indifferently cool is almost one transcendent theme that was found in most of my interviewees.

These attitudes of being indifferently cool also manifest themselves as the rejection heteronormativity and an opposition to social institutions that can restrict

their freedom such as marriage. In one of the focus group discussions, the participants, when they realized that I was wearing a wedding ring, brought up the subject of my marriage. They jokingly made fun of me and expressed their condescending thoughts about the institution of marriage. I have come to realise throughout my interactions with the participants of this study that almost all of them tend to look upon with scorn at notions of family and marriage because they feel that these institutions often reinforce the mainstream values and beliefs of the existing system that they are uncomfortable with. Doğa (age 19) said sneeringly *“Marriage is not my thing. Lately, my friend, Semiha married a guy. We should have known that she would end up getting married with that name”*. At this point all participants began to laugh out loud because she laid emphasis on the name of her friend which is a respected, traditional and old fashioned name among ‘modern’ or more ‘contemporary’ names. Doğa was equating the possible reasoning of her friend’s willingness to marry, with her name - which in a joking manner made reference to being middle class, traditional or mainstream.

However being indifferently cool is not solely about resisting heteronormativity. Much more so, it is an attitude among these young people that they take on towards life in general. In this sense, I was highly intrigued to understand why this was such an important characteristic trait among these young people. Furthermore, I was also eager to understand why my participants felt as they did – indifferently cool. I feel it may be possible to argue that their indifferently cool attitude towards the majority and even towards life itself may be associated with the political climate in Turkey. I will not go so far as to argue that this is the only reason behind their attitudes towards mainstream society, but I do feel that the frustrating political atmosphere in Turkey plays a role. I feel as such because through my engagement with my participants I have come to realise how difficult it gradually became for them to be ‘marginal’ or ‘alternative’ or ‘different’ in Turkish society. Throughout my interviews and participant observations, I was reminded over and over again that the political climate in Turkey, and its reflections in the mainstream society, tended to ‘otherise’ alternative people and did not see them as a positive form of diversity.

I felt that as a reaction to this ‘otherisation’ or ‘marginalisation’ these young people started losing interest in politics in general. For instance, youth that I

interviewed lost their interest in political sphere because they could feel a sense of belonging neither to their country nor to any political party in Turkey. As Su, a 25 years old female respondent stated, *“I refuse to vote in the coming elections because all of them are the same for me. I do not like their opinions or actions so I gave up. I do not want to be involved in anything in this country”* (Su, age 25).

The effects of the ‘state of emergency’ that has been going on for the past 20 months, hatred discourse among politicians and partisan mainstream media might create controversies in society. Consequently, living in this socially, culturally and politically suffocating environment bring about a new way of resisting, which is resistance through neglecting of the ‘other’ or more precisely resistance through creating new power relations with a superior position against majority. *“I have nothing in common with this culture and in the same way no sense of belonging to the society. I do not think that this society is conscious and educated and the only thing to do is to change the mentality of people if we want a better future”* (Derin, age 22). While Derin was showing his displeasure because of the ignorance of people in the society, Su (25) supported his opinions and feelings in a similar vein. *“If it was possible, I would gather all the people that I like in an isolated area and live together happily without the society”*.

On another note however, I could clearly say that contrary to most of these young people’s lack of involvement in political debates, they are quite concerned with politics of everyday life such as issues related to gender equality, animal rights and environmental problems. Furthermore, throughout the time I spent among my participants, I have come to realize that they almost always kept themselves up to date with the latest developments, especially political ones, but they seem to prefer to make fun of politics and abstain from taking an action. This situation was expressed cynically with the words of Bilge (24) *“I will vote for Tayyip this time”* implying his boredom because of the political environment and the current government’s world-views which were completely against his opinions and vision.

It needs to be stated here however, that in spite of their indifferently cool manners, they actually have concerns on social issues. For instance, they really care about animal rights and treat them with respect. As one of my younger interviewees has stated, *“It makes me uncomfortable even just to say that I am feeding street animals because I don’t feel like I am feeding them per se. I love them, I look after*

them, I feel like I am sharing my life with them. I wish I could be a vegetarian but in Turkey going vegetarian or vegan is extremely difficult. There is no equivalent for meat in restaurants or markets or even if there is, it is very expensive” (Berk, age 20). Contrarily, some of the participants are strictly vegan or vegetarian that they only eat in vegan/vegetarian cafes and restaurants or prepared their own food. “I think it is a matter of awareness. You cannot be a vegan in one day or because of its popularity among your friends. You have to dedicate yourself. For example, I have concerns about animal rights and stopped eating meat and dairies, instead I began to follow vegan blogs and prepared my own food” (Derin, 22).

In response to Derin’s expression, some of the participants claimed that popularisation of veganism/vegetarianism or healthy food choices are derived from popular culture and social media rather than ethical concerns. Therefore, they stated that there are two types of people. One has the ‘awareness’ as themselves and the other who changes her/his opinions by following trends in social media and goes with the flow. I could say that they positioned themselves against popular culture and tried to construct their own meanings. However, their desire for more freedom and equality became apparent throughout the focus group discussions, their stance against majority and mainstream values were comprised of poorly political actions. They have taken a different tack and dealt with their problems through mocking and joking about them alongside *indifferently cool* attitudes.

4.5 The Use of Social Media among Alternative Youth in Izmir

One of the much-discussed topics in my focus groups was the role of social media and Internet use in daily life. Although discussions began with the leading questions regarding the effects of trends in social networking sites and popular culture among youth, they quickly spread out to other issues related with the social and cultural aspects of being a part of the virtual world. The first issue that my participants laid stress on was the everchanging and shifting nature of popular culture and social media trends.

I believe that there is a paradoxical relationship between popular culture and identity construction processes of alternative youth. On the one hand, social media is an inseparable part of their lives, not only because it gives access to the latest news and trends but also because it provides for a broad and flexible platform for sharing and commenting. Their active engagement with social media channels offer

them semiotic resources to choose from a variety of popular culture practices, which in turn has a driving force for the constitution of self. On the other hand however, these young people want to take a stance against these practices of popular culture discourse, claiming that they do not feel in any way a part of the mainstream popular cultural practices and values.

A topic which most my respondents reached a consensus on was the ways in which the wide spread use of social media had an impact on mixing cultural practices from various social classes. For instance, when they were giving the example of rap music, they argued that the Internet use has now made the cultural tastes and practices of the 'lower class' much more visible. According to most of them, rap music had originated from the slums and with the help of the Internet was now a part of the mainstream popular culture. They claimed that the distinctions between classes were blurred and that they had shifted mainly due to social networking sites. This issue of the blurring of class distinctions was articulated in Efe's words as follows, "*In my opinion, the division between middle and lower classes are becoming ambiguous. How you present yourself and show yourself off in social media is the only thing that matters. You may be coming from a lower class but you can be somebody else in social media. The number of followers is the most important thing*" (Efe, age 22).

During discussions on the effects of the Internet and social media, more often than not, my participants' examples focused around popular social media platforms. Thus, sites like Instagram and Youtube, which can perhaps be described as inherently visual, proved to be some of the most favored virtual spaces among alternative young people. A major point emphasized in these discussions was the ways in which these social networking sites made it possible for different strata in the society to be visible to each other. My respondents claimed that this was not the case before the wide spread use of the Internet, as according to them television or other forms of mass media were not as effective on this front. For instance, when talking about Youtube and how it makes it possible to see life in the slums, an interviewee suggested, "*We can see with our eyes what is going on in "varoş" or watch their videos on Youtube.*" (Deniz, age 24). Similarly, when Bilge (age 24) was reflecting on this issue of the visibility of different groups, his examples were from amateur rappers on Youtube; "*For example, families do not want their*

children to listen to rap or electronic music but children usually play games, watch videos on internet and what they hear is not classical music but these kinds of music”.

On the other hand, Su (age 25) emphasized the importance of cultural capital and the ridiculousness of making an unnecessary effort to show off in social media. *“For instance, there are people who are into clubbing, they share photos and selfies, and dance with the songs of Demet Akalin, I just can’t stand these types of people. It does not matter how much money they have, they will always be ‘varoş’ and ignorant for me. Someone from lower class might be more intellectual than these so called upper class individuals”.*

Moreover, sharings in social media platforms carry vital importance in identity construction processes because there is a general opinion that social media profiles should be considered as a reflection of someone’s personality. As Can puts it, *“An Instagram profile gives the first impression. People can share what they like, express themselves easily”* (Can, age 23). In all the focus group discussions I have conducted, I have repeatedly come across an enthusiasm and special interest to talk about their times spent online, which I believe demonstrates the importance of the Internet and technology in these young people’s daily lives. Even though the ways in which alternative youth cultures are represented in both social media platforms and mainstream media outlets have problematic aspects, they have no restriction for visibility both in the virtual environment and in everyday life. In fact, their visibility depicts them as objects of desire by showcasing their styles and cultural practices, which in turn, brings recognition to them. Their cultural practices and products including what they wear, what they like, what they listen to, what they eat, all form a new niche market which inevitably has its articulations in the sphere of popular culture. As a response to this newly forming market, it has now become common place in Izmir to encounter the opening of new cafes, bars, along with the organization of festivals, cultural events and the transformation of urban spaces.

In spite of youth’s extensive use of social media, there are also ones who have negative judgements towards it. In fact, this was a topic which became a hotly debated one in most of my focus group discussions. There seem to be two camps on this issue. One consists of those who feel that social media is an inevitable part of social life, while the other emphasize that most self representations in the virtual

realm are not real, hence social media platforms and profiles shared there are not to be trusted. Among the latter group of young people there seems to be a general tendency to feel that 'likes' and 'comments' cannot reflect someone's objective and real opinions. In this sense, they feel that the virtual realm is nothing more than an illusory world. As Berk has stated in a focus group discussion, "*People try to portray their opinions and lifestyles differently in social media. They simply try to attract attention and take shape without thinking*" (Berk, age 20). On a similar note, Efe argued as follows, "*It is a fake world that is made up of likes and dislikes. For instance, you and a beautiful girl share the same things but she definitely will get more likes just because she is beautiful*" (Efe, age 23). In the same line of thinking Belgin states, "*For instance, I do not care what people upload to their profiles*". But then she continues with a sneer on her face, "*but I have an obsession with even numbers, so when I like someone's photos, I feel like I have to like photos from another profile as well so that the numbers are made even*" (Belgin, age 20). While the case of Belgin may sound as a one off personal incident, even then, it is telling in terms of depicting how likes and dislikes on social media are usually arbitrary and devoid of reason.

Although almost all my respondents have explicitly stated that they find it important to be actively involved in social media platforms, they have also made it clear that they are sceptical about what they encounter in these platforms as they tend to think that there is something uncanny about virtual life. Therefore, they mostly prefer to meet new people in real-life occasions and hang out in small groups. Almost all the participants of the conducted focus groups expressed that for them the essential prerequisite for making friends was to have more or less the same life views and styles. For example, in one of the focus group discussions, a participant stated as follows; "*Even though I may not know them in person, I feel close to people who share the same style as myself because it gives me a sense that they will understand me*" (Tolga, age 23). On a similar note, another respondent made a similar emphasis through his following words; "*I do not need many people in my life but I like to be able to share my interests with the ones that are around me - such as the new music band or pc games that I discover recently*" (Cenk, age 19).

As a concluding note, I can state that while social media plays a crucial role in the everyday practices of these young people, it does not take the place of ‘real life’ socialization. Both my field notes and focus group interviews demonstrate that alternative youth prefer to meet in homes or they become regulars at bars they like. With reference to group discussions I conducted, two positions appear concerning how most of these young people choose to socialize. One group prefers to stay at home during the weekends, watching TV series, films, playing video games, reading books, listening to music etc. The second group is more interested in active leisure activities such as going to bars, concerts or art exhibitions. As Burak notes, *“If I want to socialize I go out at night but normally I enjoy staying at home alone or with my friends. I smoke weed, play with my cat, draw a picture or read a book”* (Burak, age 25). Tolga on the other hand suggests, *“I go out at night because I want to see people... people like me”* (Tolga, age 23). These expressions of course, do not refer to permanent facts or clearly defined leisure spheres but rather point out intertwined and fluid fields of tastes and likes. For instance, there are long and controversial discussions on which TV series or films are worth watching and there does not seem to be an agreement among these young people on such issues. Furthermore, social media use does not negate ‘real life’ socialization for any of them. To the contrary, the two seem to compliment each other.

4.6 Discussion

In the first three chapters of this thesis, I have tried to draw an analytical framework. In this final chapter, I have used this analytical framework as a context within which I elaborate on my fieldwork findings. I should note at this point that my main purpose in this study was not merely to ‘analyze’ these young people. Rather I considered this research as a project that would enable me to better understand the lives of my participants. I knew from the start that to be able to understand the young people I worked with, I needed to hear their own stories from themselves as much as possible. However, to initiate discussion and to create a spearhead (even if a loose one), I started my journey with some open ended questions such as:

- How might we discuss contemporary youth cultures? What are the characteristics and semiotic resources of ‘alternative’ youth cultures that may be encountered in Izmir?

- How are cultural identities formed in youth cultures and how are they defined as being ‘alternative’ or ‘cool’ against the majority of the society? To what extent are their salient traits ‘distinctive’ and ‘authentic’?
- Do they have any problems with being ‘popular’ and ‘mainstream’?
- Is it possible to define these groups with a specific ethos of consumption or structural determinants like social class, gender, ethnicity etc.?
- Alongside their own perception of self, how do they make sense of the world they live in? How do they express their opinions, feelings, emotions? Do they have any political agendas and engagements or are they concerned with social problems?

Over the course of my fieldwork, some of these questions shape shifted, some became irrelevant while some new ones emerged that I had not thought of at the outset of this study. When answering these loose open-ended questions, some themes became emphasized over and over again by my interviewees. The issues they laid emphasis on the most became prominent both throughout the thesis and in this chapter in particular. At this point I merged some of these themes in this last chapter to formulate subsections, under which I have elaborated on my fieldwork data. I can roughly list some of these themes as follows:

- Problem of labelling and categorizing alternative youth,
- social construction of the self and the other,
- cultural formations and the social construction of meaning,
- style,
- cultural capital and intellectual background,
- the sphere of leisure,
- vintage,
- second hand and kitsch,
- politics of everyday life,
- use of social media and popular culture.

In this sense, the first issue that I found myself trying to tackle was how to define these young individuals and the structure of contemporary youth subcultural formations in general. Since this study focused on specific youth cultural identities, I have greatly benefited from subculture studies. As I engaged in these subculture

debates, I realized that I was uncomfortable with the labels and categorizations which were commonly used for the definition of subculture groups. So, for me it seemed the first issue that needed tackling was addressing the problematic sides of labeling my participants. However, I was also aware that classifications would be useful to make a meaningful and coherent analysis. Thus, I tried to avoid using specific labels which would cause homogenizing stereotypes, but all the while relied on looser categories. I want to make it clear that all categories and concepts I have employed throughout my thesis were uttered by my participants themselves. This was the solution I came up with to the problem of labeling. I used the labels my participants uttered themselves.

Even though all participants have distinct individualistic self-identifications, they were at a consensus on this one issue that every alternative young individual ought to be 'alternative', 'different', 'authentic', 'original' and 'unique' and that s/he should express her/his authenticity through unusual as well as creative styles, tastes, individualistic and artistic expressions compared to the majority. According to my focus group discussions and in depth interviews, alternative young people tended to stay away from following trends or any cultural practices that belonged to the sphere of popular culture, because they felt that even the slightest of semiotic resources that reminded mainstream values and beliefs were a threat towards depleting their authenticity and originality. They explicitly defined themselves as marginal to the mainstream culture. In return, they argued that this notion of 'being different' manifested itself in the form of discrimination and harassment within the mainstream society. They constantly mentioned how they faced discrimination in their daily lives and how they felt like an outsider. I want to point out that this comparison plays a crucial role in their identity construction process and definition of the self. Correspondingly, their expression of the self involves opinions about themselves that make strong references to the other. In my view, this shows us that similar to any cultural environment, identity construction processes among alternative youth in Izmir cannot be independent from power relations or relations to the other.

Throughout my field research, alternative youth's leisure activities, cultural formations and social construction of meaning became other main topics of the analysis. Even though they deployed a broad range of semiotic resources to define

themselves, some of the traits were peculiar to all participants of the study. For instance, 'being indifferently cool' turned out to be one of the key features that identified with individuality, genuineness and authenticity in the focus group discussions. According to them, coolness is closely associated with style, cultural capital and intellectual background. Therefore, I have opted to adopt style as an umbrella term to refer not only to my participants' outlooks, but also to their artistic expressions, and opinions on social, cultural and political issues based on their narratives. In this context, I suggest that a variety of social and cultural meanings and connotations were attributed to style which work as a means to confirm their coolness. An interesting point that was often made within this context was that they did not see having the exact same styles and leisure activities with other people as a problem. They felt that the meanings attributed to these styles or hobbies could all be different, hence reinforcing the uniqueness and originality of the individual. Therefore, I believe it would be safe to argue that their everyday practices, leisure activities and the way they make sense of the world depend on their cultural and intellectual capital.

I could say that alternative youth's cultural meanings are created through the processes of collecting, combining, mixing and even cannibalizing different symbols, images and products both from the past and from the present. Their interest in nostalgia and the past manifests itself in vintage and retro culture, ironic ways of expressions such as exaggeration, bad taste and kitsch, which fulfil their sensibilities towards alternativeness and authenticity.

In my opinion, there is no limit for bad taste and kitsch in this recycling and bricolage culture, which in fact generates a more creative, fruitful and unique cultural form and meaning making process in the daily lives of these young people. This reflection of cultural bricolage is a vital element of their identity construction because it is not something confined to their styles or hobbies but rather it spreads into all spheres of everyday life. As an example, I shared in this chapter my participant observation from the Epic Fair Festival which actually transformed the nostalgic but traditional image of K lt r Park into something vintage and cool among alternative youth. These collages of various cultural forms and practices fostered new cultural meanings with authentic and intellectual depth. Similarly, new nostalgic cafes and bars, third wave coffee shops which serve not only coffee

but a cultural sphere, healthy vegan/vegetarian cafes, second hand and vintage shops, new indie music movements are all examples of this ongoing change in culture. These changes in the sphere of leisure and culture bring about transformations in urban space and become an integral part of neoliberal politics. Hence, I would conclude that these cultural forms created by young people unintentionally turn into a product, and become integrated into the culture industry and popular culture.

Another important theme that I want to draw attention to is the sphere of leisure related with consumption practices. This topic is widely discussed among scholars interested in subculture studies with an emphasis on structural determinants such as class, gender, race, ethnicity and so on. It is my contention that niche consumption practices and cultural commodities of alternative young individuals enable them to form new ways of sociality, new ways of artistic expressions, and new ways of cultural codes among them. However, these consumption practices and ironic ways of expressions in the sphere of leisure required at least being financially well off alongside education, intellectuality, stylistic acquisitions hence, I argue that still there are traces of social class among alternative youth in Izmir. According to focus group participants, the distinction between classes have diminished and blurred compared to the past and they have no negative opinions about lower class culture. However, I cannot state that they have special concerns on class inequalities with taking political actions. Rather, since majority tends to *otherise* these alternative young people, their indifferently cool attitudes also seem to reflect on their involvement in political life. They constantly reminded me their lack of interest and negative feelings about the political climate in Turkey and stated that their only concern belonged to the politics of everyday life which may directly affect their lives such as gender equality, animal rights or environmental issues.

As a concluding comment on this chapter, I argue that these thematic discussions with reference to the lives of alternative young people in Izmir have all connections with each other and provide for a holistic understanding. While it is not possible to fully understand the subjects of this study by looking solely at their specific cultural practices, it is my contention that such a full understanding is not possible simply through glossing over their cultures at large either. In this sense, in this chapter I have tried to converge a micro perspective where I have delved into

their daily cultural practices with a macro perspective where I have attempted to form the links between these cultural practices to reach a holistic portrait.



CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This thesis should be seen as a step taken to understand the alternative youth cultural identities as a contemporary subcultural formation in Izmir. Throughout the thesis, I aimed at examining the ways in which youth cultural identities and their meaning-making processes are constructed by focusing on their own narratives and everyday life experiences. It is my contention that opening up a debate on youth subcultures that concentrates on the micro cosmos of everyday life practices such as consumption habits, leisure activities, tastes, styles, forms of socialization, engagements with social media and popular culture have the potential to give salient clues about the transformations of that society, its cultural values and beliefs, and new ways of relating to things and people. Furthermore, a multilayered reading of youth culture is crucial to observe the ongoing and reflexive processes of identity construction and the social construction of meanings, which may reflect the social, political and cultural climate of Turkey.

Although at the beginning of this work, I was intrigued with the ‘hipster’ subculture, particularly with regard to their representations in popular culture, the direction of the study has evolved into something more complex and different when I began to read more on this topic and started making my observations in the field. I touched upon these issues at the Introduction part of the thesis and posed several research questions that illuminated my way. I do not claim that I have found clear answers to all of these questions during my research. However, I could claim that I have gained insights into how they make sense of things to some extent and acquired ideas about the tendencies they favored. In this sense, I feel that this study has found its own self through the narratives of my participants. This was something I greatly valued, as I did not want to impose my research agendas on these young people whose lives I set out to understand. Now, at the end of this research, when I am writing these final pages of my thesis, I am satisfied that this study has been much more about the voices of my participants compared to my own itineraries.

Since I set out to understand how ‘alternative’ youth create meanings in their everyday lives and construct cultural identities, as mentioned above, I opted to formulate research questions and explore this new social phenomenon with a more flexible and creative research design which allowed me to make new theoretical

interpretations and to see subjective, deeper meanings. Hence, I adopted qualitative research methods. I made participant observation where mostly alternative youth spend time such as third wave coffee shops, bars and cafes where cultural and art events are arranged, second hand and vintage shops, vegan/vegetarian cafes, music festivals and streets of Alsancak. Within the context of Izmir, these stand out as places where ‘alternative’ youth is highly visible. In these cultural spaces, I conducted in-depth interviews with the owners of cafes and shops. While this constituted an important component of my research, the greater part of my data was comprised of focus group interviews with alternative young people. These interviews and focus group discussions with the members of alternative youth subcultures have made it possible for me to gain insights into the subjects of my study from their own perspectives and from their own experiences. I should like to note here once again that to turn this thesis into a research as such has been my strongest motivation from the start. When I look back now, I see that to let my participants speak for themselves has proved to be a fruitful approach as their own narratives have opened up fresh and unthought-of areas of inquiry which in turn has helped me to gain a better understanding about the opinions, interests, feelings and worries of my participants.

I have tried to construct the analytical framework of this study from a broad range of theories including popular culture and mass culture debates, cultural theory and youth and subculture theories and positioned my field study within this theoretical background which was suitable for the purpose of this study and enhanced a deeper comprehension. I have tried to formulate these attempts under three chapters. In the first chapter of the thesis, I have surveyed the arguments on popular/mass culture from early theorizations to contemporary postmodern theories of cultural theory. I made particular emphasis on certain topics such as Frankfurt School and the critique of mass society, British Cultural Studies tradition, the emergence of youth and subculture studies in cultural theory and, the role of mass media in popular culture. Following this literature review on popular culture, in my second chapter, I narrowed down my discussion to youth subculture studies ranging from Chicago School and urban sociology perspectives to contemporary approaches on youth culture. This critical engagement with the literature has made it possible for me to deploy a critical mind set in my next chapter where I have

discussed my fieldwork findings. I have allocated the third chapter of this thesis to the analysis of the data I have collected from my fieldwork. This was also the chapter where I have elaborated in detail, on particular themes and topics that stood out from my interviews and focus group discussions. In this sense, the third chapter of this thesis can be seen as my genuine attempt to engage with my data and make sense of the everyday cultural practices of alternative young people who were the subjects of this research.

Having been conducted in one of the major cities of Turkey with an attempt to elaborate on complex, hybrid and authentic youth subcultures embracing both group identities as well as individualities inside these groups, I believe that this study has been the first of its kind. Since not much research has been done on youth cultures in Turkey, I tried to map out a more general framework to discuss the expressions of these young individuals with the expectation that this would pave the way for further research. In this sense, I should like to see this thesis as a contribution into the discussions on subculture studies in Turkey, which demand further attention both qualitatively and quantitatively. Hence, with all my humbleness, I hope that through its field work data, theoretical discussions and analytical insights, this study may pave the way for much needed further research that aim at expanding our understanding on alternative youth cultures both in Izmir and in Turkey.

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