

Object or Subject? The Paradox of « Youth » in Turkey

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« Our mnemonic culture [insists on] the novelty
of no longer fetishizing the new »

[Huysen, 1995: 6].

« How can you call us 'young'?
How can you call us 'new'?
We are just getting used to love, death and art
Our soccer player, our singer, our queer
It's really a moot hope:
Our retirement will end one day.
We were old when you gave birth to us,
We will get younger as we die! »

[Kiremitçi, 1998: 32].

A columnist in a Turkish newspaper recently asked: « Will nothing really be the same again? » [Kaplanoglu, 1999: 6] referring to the impact of the earthquake of August 17, 1999, on the Turkish psyche. The writer Murathan Mungan [1994] used a similar metaphor earlier in what seems today like a prophetic statement: « I think Turkey has really come to lean against the wall. There is nowhere to go; either the wall will crumble or it will be dismantled. If it crumbles, we will be crushed below, if it is dismantled maybe we will move to another space – or at least try to. »

The earthquake is an apt metaphor for the large-scale dislocation of Turkish society at the wake of the millennium. This dislocation stems from the attempt to construct a single national identity upon the body of a multireligious, multiethnic, multilingual empire. The main instrument in this civilizational process, based on a localized version of Enlightenment ideas, was educated youth¹.

Recent studies have emphasized the historical and cultural variability of experiences of modernity outside the Euro-American context. These studies indicate that Western modernity itself constitutes a culture located in time and space, rather than a universal paradigm. This suggests that there is not one, but

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1 In a classic study, Benedict Anderson [1993: 109] notes that one of the features that distinguishes nationalist movements in non-Western societies from earlier movements in Europe is the central role played by a new generation of European-educated elites. For a study of elites in Turkey, see Göle [1986].

many modernities [Gaonkar, 1999; Bozdogan, Kasaba, 1997]. The emergence of « youth » as a distinct category and stage in the life cycle is linked to the history of modernity in Europe. How, on the other hand, is the transition from childhood to adulthood experienced and constructed in non-Western modernities? The Turkish case suggests that studies of youth, which largely focus on age-based subcultures, can benefit from contextualization within a wider frame of age, life cycle and generation.

In this article, I analyse the construction of youth in public discourse during three periods in recent Turkish history. I argue that in the first period (1923-1950), youth – educated youth in particular – came to embody the new nation. In the second period (1950-1980), in which a student movement led to widespread violence between « leftists » and « rightists, » youth were reconstructed in public discourse as rebels, and as a major threat to the nation. However, young people involved in the student movement viewed the incumbent government itself as illegitimate, perceiving themselves as acting in the name of « the people » to build a just society. In these two periods, then, despite a change in discourse, educated youth largely identified with the mission assigned them of transforming society from above – although most young people, as the rural masses as a whole, remained silent in public discourse.

Globalization has been linked to changing conceptions of time/space. A future-oriented modernist concept of time (the time of the nation) is being replaced by an orientation in the present (the time of the self/body) along with a new orientation to the past through memory [Huyssen, 1995]. I argue that the third and current period (post-'80) in Turkey constitutes the first serious rupture with a modernist construction of youth, just as it constitutes a break in Turkish political culture as a whole. Tuna Kiremitçi is a poet in his twenties. In the poem above, the narrator addresses the older generation, rejecting their construction of youth as « new, » along with the mission it implies. We find in this poem an image of the « young » burdened by the weight passed on by previous generations, who themselves acclaimed the « newness » of the young.

The rise of a global youth culture in recent decades suggests greater convergence between the experiences of young people in global cities. Mass-based youth subcultures with links to the diaspora are emerging, paralleling the fragmentation of Turkish society into enclaves based on identity politics [Kaya, 1998]. Turkish youth are torn between hopes of constructing a more participatory public sphere and disillusionment with the nation-state as the embodiment of modernity. The process of transition of youth from object to subject is still in the making.

Youth: a generational approach

Research on youth, as distinct from the study of age and the life course in anthropology, has been historically associated with the fields of psychology, education and sociology [Erikson, 1968]. « Youth » tends to be defined demographically as an age cohort between the ages of 15 and 24 [U.N., 1993]. A more comparative cultural definition might characterize it as a liminal time of

transition from childhood to adulthood, a transition which may be abrupt or prolonged depending on the context².

It is important to distinguish the definition and representation of youth from above, such as by powerholding adults, from the ways in which young persons view and represent themselves. Much of 20th century sociology has viewed youth as deviant anti-citizens – often imagining them as black males in the process [Comaroff, Comaroff, forthcoming].

Was Western society unique in accentuating the gulf between children and adults [Foucault, 1976]? The existing literature raises particular challenges for the study of youth in non-Western societies. Whereas contemporary studies tend to assume the universality of youth as a category, there are few historical and ethnographic studies of how youth is constructed in non-Western societies. Although young people played a central role in anti-colonial movements, for example, there are few studies from an age-based perspective. Of particular interest are comparisons between different imperial traditions, such as the Ottoman Empire [Mardin, 1988], Russia [Pilkington, 1994] and China [Cherrington, 1997; Calhoun *et alii*, 1999]. The Turkish case suggests that the concept of generation, defined as an age cohort with a shared historical experience [Mannheim, 1952; Pilcher, 1994], is particularly useful in studying young people in societies characterized by rapid social change, a powerful intelligentsia, the centrality of collective identity (including age-based groups) in the construction of subjectivity and the maintenance of historical constructs of age in the process of adoption of modernist notions of youth.

In a classic study of generations, Karl Mannheim underscores the formative period in which an individual's identity emerges. According to Mannheim [1952], persons raised in the same socio-historical period are marked in ways which makes it possible for them to develop a generational consciousness if their cohort comes to experience transformative historical events. In such a case, an age-cohort is transformed into a generation with a distinct identity. Even when subunits of a generation have conflicting views, they share the same moral universe, associated with the historical period in which they came of age³.

In the last decade, transnationalism, the dismantling of the welfare state, and the rise of identity politics have necessitated new approaches and new methodologies in the study of youth. Globalization began to blur previous distinctions between North and South, and between regions. A recent study in the field of geography characterizes youth cultures as global hybrid cultures which need to be viewed as open systems [Massey, 1998]. However, the forms this hybridization takes might be very different. Recent work on youth, particularly in the field of cultural studies, has focused on popular culture, including music, style, image and performance. These studies highlight in particular the experiences of women, racial/ethnic subclasses and second-generation immigrants [Gross *et alii*,

2 In India, for example, the wealthier, urbanized and educated sectors of society may be said to « have » a period of youth, whereas among poorer sectors the transition from childhood to adulthood remains sudden [Kumar, 2000].

3 As Kriegel [1978] notes, generation is essentially an elitist concept linked to the rise of an intelligentsia.

1996]. A by-product of the rise of identity politics may be an increase in age-based mobilization, suggesting that youth may be gaining autonomy as a social category the world over, despite their economic marginalization [Diouf, 2000]. Jean and John Comaroff suggest that youth embody the contradictions of late capitalism, constituting a new counter or « alien-nation » outside the modern nation-state as we know it. The exclusion of young people from established institutional spaces has resulted in the creation of alternative spaces and forms of political mobilization, particularly through new communication technologies. The issue for youth today is how to achieve (or maintain) the promises of modernity, including an inclusive social democracy, within the conditions of neo-liberal globalization.

« Wild blood »: Age in Turkish Society

Most studies of youth in Turkey have been carried out in the fields of psychology, education and sociology. These studies tend to be based on quantitative surveys administered at a given point in time to a subset of the population defined as « youth » [Konrad Adenauer Foundation, 1999]. More historically oriented studies include accounts of the student movement, which focus on the experience of a small but significant subsection of the population [Kabacali, 1992]. Previous studies have pointed to the central role of the family and of the ideology of nationalism in shaping individual identity in Turkey [Sirman, 1990], though there are few studies which relate age as a cultural construct to generational identity and to the emergence of youth subcultures in Turkey.

In Turkish society, « youth » is associated with the state of being unmarried, or not yet a householder. For both men and women, until relatively recently, marriage in their teens conferred adult status⁴. According to Serif Mardin [1988], youth was conceived as a period of apprenticeship in Ottoman society. Historically, the relationship between elders and juniors was marked in the family, the educational system, the system of apprenticeship, the organization of religious brotherhoods and the military establishment.

The distinction between elders (*büyükler*) and juniors (*küçükler*) is central to the construction of personhood in Turkish society. Age is marked in kinship terminology [Spencer, 1960]. Elder siblings are distinguished on the basis of age and gender, whereas younger siblings are referred to by a single term, undifferentiated by gender. Age cohorts play an important role in defining identity and establishing structures of dominance in Turkish society, and individuals tend to define themselves with reference to their generation.

Turkish society does acknowledge a stage of potentially unruly behaviour particularly among young males, who are referred to as *delikanli* (those with wild blood). Historically, it was often single young men who became involved in acts of collective rebellion [Dural, 1999] – the threat of nonconforming behaviour on the part of single *young* women, on the other hand, required more stringent and

⁴ According to Duben and Behar [1991], the city of Istanbul was a special case where age at marriage was later than the norm in Anatolia at the turn of the century.

internalised systems of domination [Sirman, 1990]. In addition to the requirements of agricultural and pastoral production, then, it was preferable, for reasons of social control, to keep the period between puberty and marriage – the period of « wild blood » – as short as possible. « Wild blood » was to be channelled along tracks acceptable to adult society, such as the military, apprenticeship, agricultural/pastoral labour – and early marriage.

According to Mardin [1988], the period of reforms known as the Tanzimat (1839-1876) ushered in a new conception of youth in Ottoman society. Westernization began with attempts to modernize the army. The first educational institution in the Western mould was a military school, and the first official student associations were paramilitary groups which served the joint purpose of mobilizing young people for war and inculcating nationalism [Toprak, 1985]. In the late XIXth century, educated young men were called upon to « save » the Empire. It was the students of the new schools that would eventually challenge the regime they were educated to protect and maintain. It is from such a group of Western-educated young army officers that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk would emerge. Similarly, in the 1960s, educated youth would challenge the state, again, however, with the aim of « saving the country ».

« Guardians of the Regime » : Youth and the Nation (1923-1950)

The Turkish Republic was established in 1923 upon the remains of a multilingual, multiethnic and multireligious empire reduced to the space of Anatolia. The emphasis on the modernizing role of educated youth beginning in the Tanzimat period culminated in the 1920s in a veritable cult of youth initiated by the new state in an attempt to build a national consciousness and a modern nation-state. This was to be achieved by cutting ties with the Ottoman past, the world of the elders [Mardin, 1988].

Education (including institutions such as the People's Houses and the Village Institutes) played a central role in the Turkish social engineering project aimed at creating a homogenous population with a single shared identity [Kaplan, 1999]. Young people were central to the ideology of Turkish nationalism because the goal of the regime was to create a new type of person with a new mind-set, imbued with the values of the Republic and freed of « the shackles of tradition. » Young men and women were the main images through which the Republic was represented. A « Youth and Sports Holiday » was established, and celebrated with great shows of gymnastics [Mardin, 1977].

At the end of the long speech delivered by Mustafa Kemal to the Second Congress of the Republican People's Party (RPP) on October 15-20, 1927, Atatürk directly addresses the youth. The famous lines from this speech, committed to heart by every Turkish student, include the following: « Turkish youth! Your first duty is to maintain and protect Turkish independence and the Turkish Republic forever. This is the primary basis of your existence and of your future. This constitutes your most valuable treasure. The child of Turkey's future! Your duty is to save Turkish independence and the Republic. You will find the strength that you need to achieve this in the noble blood that flows in your veins! » [Atatürk, 1989: 1197].

Along similar lines, the « oath » recited by Turkish schoolchildren every morning, written by former Minister of Education Resid Galip (1932-33), goes as follows: « I am a Turk, upright, diligent. My law is to respect my elders, protect those younger than myself. To love my country and nation more than my own self. My ideal is to rise up and go forward. Let my being be sacrificed for the sake of Turkish existence! » [Sakaoglu, 1992: 61.] The relationship between elders and juniors is reinvented in this oath as an attribute of « Turkishness ». Here, the « self » of the Republic comes before the « self » of the individual, who must be prepared to sacrifice himself/herself for the nation.

Young people were the primary recipients of the benefits of the « young » Republic. A potent symbol of achievement and means of social mobility in Turkish society, education is imbued with an aura of sacredness. The young people who identified most closely with the new system were those who entered the public education system and achieved upward mobility during this period. The term « The children of the Republic » (or « Atatürk's children ») is used to refer to the new Republican youth.

Fazıl Hüsnü Dağlarca, a Turkish poet who was eight when the Republic was established, described this transition as an epiphany, reminiscent of a mystical experience. This lyrical account, which contrasts with the dry positivism of official texts, demonstrates the degree to which a core group of persons identified with the Kemalist transformation: « The Republic is the girl that you long for. Our whole household was suddenly transformed. It seemed as if our home had grown larger. Our garden seemed to have more trees. Even my books became clearer, more understandable » [Öktülmüs, 1998: 23].

During this period, the gap between educated youth and the young people of Anatolia remained significant. It would take decades for young persons of rural origin to be able to attend primary school. The majority of the population are conspicuous in the public discourse of this period by their silence – though there seems no shortage of those who would speak for them.

« Saving the Country »⁵: from Vanguard to Rebel (1950-1980)

Until 1950, it was primarily a urban elite that ruled Turkey through a single-party, the RPP established by Mustafa Kemal. The Democrat Party (DP), ushered in by rural votes with the transition to a multi-party system after 1946, supported the modernization of agriculture, which, together with industrialization centered in the Marmara region, would result in large-scale rural-to-urban migration, irretrievably transforming Turkish society.

Although initially popular, the DP was subsequently charged with corruption and authoritarianism, and student protests played a role in precipitating a military coup which ousted the regime in 1960. The army, the intelligentsia and university students were the main supporters of the coup [Kabacali, 1992]. The liberal

5 The expression is used ironically to refer to the endless discussions of intellectuals – usually accompanied by drinking – about politics.

constitution of 1960 allowed more room for the expression of alternative political views, and a legal party emerged on the left for the first time. University students, spurred on by local developments as well as by the events of May'68 in Europe, began rapidly to organize. Initially calling for an improvement in the conditions of universities, they soon began to support other mass movements, such as that of teachers, workers and peasants. From 1968 onwards, increasingly disillusioned with the status quo, influenced by parallel movements in Europe, Latin America and elsewhere, and spurred on by various forces with much to gain from the rise of extremism, the student movement gradually moved outside the legal terrain, culminating in increased violence followed by brutal repression subsequent to the military coup of 1971 (and again in 1980) [Samim, 1981].

This period was characterized by the widespread politicization of youth, particularly university students, who were increasingly divided into the two opposed camps of « rightists » and « leftists ». Studies of youth in this period tended to focus on the left, particularly the early years of the left referred to as « '68 » [Çubukçu, 1998]. There are fewer studies of the student movement on the right, particularly from within. Although there are some useful attempts at a critique of the left from within [Alpay, 1988], existing studies tend to focus on political history, including the arcane ideological debates which characterized the leftist movement. There is a need for a *cultural* reading of this period, including a comparison between the movements on the left and the right.

During this period, youth were reconstructed in public discourse as a « threat » to the national interest. The media referred to student activists as *eskiya*, or bandits [Feyizoglu, 1998: 288]. Students themselves claimed that it was the incumbent government itself that was illegitimate. In autobiographical accounts, students who joined the leftist movement in its inception tend to identify with the early years of the Republic: « The '68 generation did not appear out of the blue. My mother and father were children of the Atatürk period. That's how we were raised as well. We are continuing the tradition we inherited from Mustafa Kemal » [Feyizoglu, 1998: 266]. A statement made in court by a student in November 1968 became famous: « You are not judging 24 young people in this court, but Mustafa Kemal himself » [*idem*: 145]. In a letter addressed to his father, which was published in a daily newspaper in 1971, Deniz Gezmiş, the student leader who was hung by a military tribunal in 1972, expresses the continuity he felt between his father's generation and his own: « You raised me with Kemalist ideas. I grew up listening to memories of the War of Independence. Since then I have hated foreigners. We are the fighters of Turkey's second War of Independence » [*idem*: 266].

The degree to which the '68 movement in Turkey may be considered an heir to Kemalism has become increasingly blurred by recent attempts to mythologize (and cleanse) the experience of '68. In the 1990s, a « '68 nostalgia » has emerged, particularly in accounts of middle-aged former activists who have become powerful figures in Turkish society, particularly in the media [Baykam, 1998]. These writers tend to berate the « Post-1980 generation » and to mythicize the student leaders of the 1960s, particularly those who were hung in 1972. Those who were active in the left following the 1971 coup and 1974 amnesty, and who refer to themselves as the « '78 Generation, » on the other hand, claim to have been ignored and/or

disparaged by those who identify with '68, whom they accuse of elitism and nostalgia. Accounts of the late 1970s tend to be infused with metaphors of violence: « In the belief that they would see beautiful days, they ran from one political operation to another, feeling death like a sharp knife against their backs » [Güven, 1998]. According to a female student and former activist, « Istanbul has always reminded me of a mosquito who feeds on blood. It sucks and grows » [Özbek, 1998].

What is intriguing is that reflections in the present tend to construct '68 in opposition to the post-1980 generation, while emphasizing continuities with the Republican generation. The narrative of Gündag Kayaoglu, who was a student during the 1960s, is a case in point: « We were raised as persons willing to sacrifice, thinking of others always before oneself. This meant protecting the nation, the country, even your desk in school, which you ought not scratch up. 'This belongs to the state, you must protect it, the state is yours to protect, the Republic is yours.' That is how we were raised. I don't accuse the youth of today, but we didn't have the mentality of 'What's in it for me, brother?' I think of Atatürk as someone who had planned for what would happen seventy years later. He did this within the conditions of his time, but this doesn't mean that it has become outdated » [Neyzi, 1999: 106].

While ideologically opposed, the political movements on the left and on the right shared significant features. They might be usefully conceptualized as generational units in Mannheim's terms. These were modernist, nationalist, anti-imperialist and corporatist political movements, whose rhetoric underscored the independence of the Turkish nation-state and the « duty » of youth to dedicate their lives to the construction of a future society, whether envisioned as the recuperation of the early Kemalist period, a socialist utopia or pan-Turkic haven. This period can also be viewed as one of continuity in terms of an age hierarchy based on the relationship between elders and juniors, which coexisted with a modernist vision of the role of educated youth.

Arjun Appadurai [1998] has suggested that violence linked to the creation of an « enemy within » may be understood in relation to the increasing uncertainty of identity generated by the problem of modernity. Violence may therefore be understood as a way of « ensuring » the certainty of the categorical identity of the « other, » and therefore of the self. There was a similar search in Turkish society for categorical identity, both on the left and on the right. Homi Bhabha [1990] argues that the nation's story is an attempt to reconcile the tension between discourses that present the people as « object » vs. « subject ». Not only is the epic form, in which people are represented as « objects, » characteristic of early Republican novels but epic heroes play a central role in the « conversion stories » of young political activists of the 1960s and 1970s [Erol, 1992]. Autobiographical accounts of political conversion read like narratives of religious conversion. These accounts tend to represent conversion as an emotional and transcendental experience – not unlike the narratives of young Kemalists in the early Republican period. In his autobiography, the poet İsmet Özel [1997] claims that he chose to join the left because it promised the possibility of becoming a « better » person in moral terms.

The student movement was marked by a cult of leaders, modelled as much on contemporary political leaders (such as Che Guevara, Atatürk or Alpaslan Türkeş⁶) as on the epic heroes of Anatolia⁷. In his autobiography, a rightist student who became a notorious killer, recalls that he was « in love with the grandiose spirit of epic heroes » and ready to become a martyr for the « sacred cause » [Kirci, 1998]. Autobiographical accounts repeatedly underscore the need activists felt to repress their individual needs, their belief in the necessity of living for the future, and their sense of having been chosen to play a special, unique role in history [Güven, 1998]. Individuals tended to pride themselves in dressing exactly like members of their own group: a « leftist » or a « rightist » male could be distinguished, for example, on the basis of his facial hair. Deniz Gezmiş declared in his court defence: « We have made a gift of our lives to the people of Turkey » [Feyizoglu, 1998 : 407].

Notwithstanding the rhetoric of equality, the student movement was organized in practice as a sort of fraternity, with a hierarchy between « elders » and « juniors » – and between men and women. Men tended to dominate the movement; a history of women in the politics of this period remains to be written [Berktaş, 1990]. Over time, the political movement became increasingly divorced from daily life outside the arcane ideological debates and militant activities which characterized life in introverted groups. Some observers have even argued that it was in part frustration with bookish debates on political theory that spurred student leaders to incite their followers to political action culminating in violence [Feyizoglu, 1999].

The student leaders, particularly during the early years, tended to come from urban middle class families, especially on the left. Their parents were educated persons who identified with the Kemalist movement. As the movement expanded, and as more students of rural background began to attend universities, political activists on both the left and the right came increasingly from rural and/or working class families⁸. In Anatolia in particular, political allegiance was linked to ethnic/religious identity. In towns with an Alevi⁹/Sunni divide, students of Alevi background tended to join leftist groups while those of Sunni background joined rightist groups. In time, these ethnic/religious affiliations would themselves become the basis of a politics of identity.

« Turning the Corner »¹⁰ or Emerging Subject? (post-1980)

The 1980 military coup was an important watershed in Turkish politics, and the early 1980s have been characterized as a « dark age » [Aydogdu, 1998: 55]. Even though civilian rule was quickly established, a new constitution was put into effect

6 The leader of the party on the extreme right (MHP) until his recent death.

7 Ironically, the leaders of the political movement of the '60s have themselves become cult figures.

8 In a prose poem, the poet Ece Ayhan refers to two well-known figures on the right and on the left: « Mehmet Ali Ağca and Yılmaz Güney (Both lived their childhood and youth in great hunger; both were completely alone.) On the other hand, those on the two opposed sides can easily exchange places in a 'table of power' » [Ayhan, 1999: 237].

9 The Alevi are an endogamous minority group whose identity has historically been defined in opposition to Sunni identity [Olsson *et alii*, 1998].

10 The expression is commonly used to refer to those who make a quick profit, usually through dishonorable means – it is also used as a metaphor for the liberalization of the economy in the post-1980 period.

which restricted civil liberties, and young people born in the 1970s were raised in a relatively depoliticised environment. The liberalization of the economy and its incorporation into the circuits of global capital marked the 1980s. With privatisation, the rise of a consumer society, and the influx of new communication technologies, the media became a major player in the society.

The 1980s saw the emergence of what became known as the « Turkish-Islamic synthesis. » After the military coup, religious education became mandatory in the school system and graduates of religious schools were allowed to attend university. What was intended as an attempt to forestall the rise of further extremism among youth resulted in the emergence of a strong Islamist movement among university students in the 1980s and 1990s [Duman, 1997]. A further challenge to Republican identity was posed by the rise of a Kurdish nationalist movement from within the left in 1984. The rise of Islamism and Kurdish nationalism led to the reactive resurgence of neo-Kemalism, ultra-Turkish nationalism, the « new left » [Göker, 1998] and to an Alevi revival in the 1990s. These are transnational social movements with links to the Turkish, Kurdish and Alevi diaspora, which make use of new communications technologies [Yavuz, 1999].

The political repression of the 1980s was accompanied by increased freedom of expression on the cultural and personal front [Gürbilek, 1992]. In the 1980s and 1990s, a variety of NGO's and subcultures including environmentalists, human rights activists, feminists, gays, rockers and others entered the public sphere, particularly through the media [Özbek, 1997]. Today, Turkish society has begun to examine its national taboos. There is a resurgence of interest in memories of the past and in the cultural legacy of the Ottoman Empire. The period leading up to the establishment of the Republic has become the focus of a heated debate. More and more subjects or citizens, including those who have had to « travel » considerably less to perform national identity, are challenging it in so far as it rejects cultural pluralism and reinforces the central role of the state as the locus of allegiance [Düzgören, 1998 : 23]. Despite increased political polarization and the emergence of new collective identities, what distinguishes this period is the language of the self/body through which hybrid identities and political demands are increasingly expressed.

Today, one half of the population is under the age of 25; these young people are increasingly urban. The rise in educational attendance and age at marriage, coupled with high unemployment, have led to the extension of youth as a life stage – without, however, reducing the economic dependence of young people on the older generation [Konrad Adenauer Foundation, 1999]. Growing economic inequalities threaten to disenfranchise an increasingly urban and youthful population from the rights of citizenship. The Turkish state is increasingly unable to provide health and educational services or employment. It is also becoming increasingly fragmented itself as the lines between the legal and the extra-legal domains are blurred due to political corruption linked to privatisation and the trade in arms and drugs. While the military remains powerful, particularly due to the undeclared war in Eastern Turkey against the PKK¹¹, private armies, mafias and

11 *Partiya Karkaren Kurdistan* (Kurdish Workers' Party), center of the Kurdish nationalist movement in Turkey since 1984.

armed fundamentalist groups have proliferated as the state is increasingly unable to control the monsters it fostered or created. Loss of legitimacy of the political system has resulted in widespread cynicism and political apathy, feeding the cycle of corruption, nepotism and anarchic individualism.

In the 1990s, new urban spaces have emerged, particularly in the global city of Istanbul, such as exclusive suburbs, along with new age and space based identities such as street children and youth subcultures [Akay, 1997]. Although the family (and local and ethnic/religious networks) remains a central node of personal identity and social mobility, there is evidence of increased generational and familial conflict [Erder, 1998]. Young people, particularly high school and university students, tend to be disproportionately represented in new social movements and alternative (including virtual) forms of political mobilization based on identity politics. In her study of secondary school students in Istanbul, Buket Türkmen [1996] shows that the public school system, which was central to the lives of students in previous generations, has become less important, with youth becoming more involved with peer-groups and informal networks, including Islamist groups. Türkmen's study demonstrates that not only universities, but high schools have become an important arena for political mobilization in the 1990s.

Türkmen also argues that despite the ideological polarization between Islamists and secularists, students exhibit a shared interest in expressing their individuality in the spaces of everyday life through the medium of the body [Türkiye Mülkiyeliler Vakfı, n.d.]. Along similar lines, a study in Germany of the children of immigrants suggests that political ideologies such as Turkish nationalism or Islamism be read as expressions of subjectivity linked to the diaspora experience. The study underscores the importance of a contextualized analysis of the relationship between political ideology and subjective identity [Tietze, 1997]. Studies of the diaspora in Western Europe underscore the links between Turkish youth and a transnational youth culture.

Just as it symbolizes a break in Turkish political culture [Keyman, 1995], the post-1980 period constitutes a rupture with modernist constructions of youth. Today, constructions of youth circulate largely through the media, where young people themselves are increasingly represented. The expression « turning the corner » is commonly used to characterize the ethos of the post-1980 period, evoking images of the wanton display of « private » lives and consumption-oriented lifestyles in the age of media and economic liberalization accompanied by widespread corruption and the private use of public resources [Gürbilek, 1992]. Youth, in particular, tend to be identified with such an ethos. Given the cultural weight of both the Republican and the '68 generations in the public sphere, members of the generation known as the « Özal generation¹² » or the « Post-1980 generation » tend to be represented as selfish, individualistic consumers, implying the lack of a sense of collective responsibility.

This is how Mina Urgan, a retired professor of literature, depicts contemporary youth in an interview in a literary magazine on occasion of the publication of her

12 A reference to Turgut Özal, prime minister and president during the 1980s and early 1990s, who played a key role in the process of economic and cultural liberalization.

memoirs: « It's a very bad period for young people. The youth that I refer to as 'Özal's brats' are in a terrible impasse if you ask me. Because, all they want is to 'turn the corner'(to make it). They also have no hope, because they know that even if they complete the best universities they may not find a job, they may receive unfair treatment. I wanted to write in order to give these young people some hope » [Çakmak, 1998]. Urgan entitled her memoirs, which became an unexpected bestseller, *The Memoirs of a Dinosaur* [Urgan, 1998]. This was her comeback to those who have come to refer to diehard Kemalists of the « Republican generation » as « dinosaurs », implying that their worldview is out of touch with the times.

The way the post-1980 generation is depicted by members of previous generations contrasts with members' own accounts. One writer in his thirties today remembers his childhood: « What the Republic meant for my generation was discipline, holding out your chest, keeping your head high, and standing while placing your hands firmly on your sides. From now on I would stand up whenever the teacher entered the room, and salute him wherever I saw him. I was a child, and if someone forced me to do something in an official setting, I would immediately reply, as I was taught in school, 'Upon your orders, teacher' » [Kaplanoglu, 1998]. This quote is distinctly different in tone from the reminiscences of members of previous generations. Here, the Republic is identified with a militaristic and bureaucratic state, from which the *individual* feels increasingly detached.

A letter sent in to a youth magazine makes a similar point: « It has been stated and imposed upon society that youth should play a role as guardian or vanguard. Thus, youth protect the honour of the neighbourhood, the brothels from American soldiers, society from communists, fascists, social democrats, religious fanatics. Those with short hair protect society from those with long hair. The ones with mustaches protect society from those without, those with beards from those without, those with jeans from those with ties, those with overcoats from those with parkas. One should be able to say that youth exists for itself » [Bilge, 1984].

Young people seem concerned with the *silences* which marked the decade in which they were raised: « The 1980s have recently come into the limelight. A beam of light is centred upon a decade spent in the dark. Our relationship with the '80s is similar to our relationship with our country, our family, and all the levels to which our identity belongs. While we were living in it – the decade of the 1980s – it was difficult for us to accept it, but now we accept it, saying: 'I realize now how much I loved you' » [Aydogdu, 1998: 55].

Young people feel they have been defined in terms of what they lack, particularly vis-à-vis previous generations. Some claim their elders used this as a form of social control, a way of legitimating '68 despite its « failure »: « We could never come to terms with our generational identity. We tried to prove that we did not belong to a youth obsessed with designer labels and personal gain. We felt oppressed by the discourse of the '68 generation, who persisted in the nostalgia of their old revolutionary days marked by comradeship, solidarity and a belief in the future » [Azak, 1998].

This quote suggests the search for a new *language* through which to express the new politics of the 1990s. For young people who reject the way they are depicted, existing categories just don't seem to fit. The denigrated « individualism » of young

people seems to be about their hesitancy in linking their subjective identities and lifestyles to a single national project. Youth, as Turkish society as a whole, seems to be fragmenting into identity-based enclaves. Can Kılçıksız, a young man of Christian-Arab heritage, puts it this way: « Only I can represent myself, no one can represent me. But I am not even sure that I can represent myself; for I cannot be myself in many contexts. What matters is not that I continue to live while hiding my difference but that I live despite my difference. Otherwise, my existence would have no meaning. For we are all so very different » [Neyzi, 1999: 71].

On October 29, 1998, celebrations commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Turkish Republic took place. The motto of the anniversary was « The Republic is 75 years old. » The treatment of street children by the police in Istanbul during the same period prompted the cartoonist Kemal Gökhan Gürses to draw a cartoon in a daily newspaper, which includes the following text: « Our Republic is 7 years old, 10 years old, at most 13-14 years old. A.K., B.L., C.Ç. We are tied to the future with a rotten rope where we disappear in the first letters of our names ¹³. Our hope has run away from home! Fear in rat holes, the dirty hands of Beyoglu ¹⁴. A new Republic is rising in the midst of the BANANA Republics. Towards winter, an ICE Republic. The only home they know, is the detention room of the police station! The Police Operation and Hatred. PEACE ¹⁵ is just an excuse! The most beautiful child is the one that was not born here ¹⁶ » [Gürses, 1998: 2].

This cartoon may be read as a reaction to a societal mission gone terribly wrong. K. G. Gürses suggests that young people, who were the hope and symbol of the Turkish revolution, have become victims of the joint brutality of the market and the state. This is a society in which state and nation have become increasingly divorced. Republicanism, which represented itself as a radical break with the past in the 1920s, has become a conservative, institutional identity associated with the status quo. This is how the poet Daglarca, who was raised in the early Republican period, expresses his disillusionment: « Let us make sure that the political leaders do not mistake the celebrations of the people [of the 75th anniversary of the Republic in 1998] as a sign of respect for their rule or as an appreciation of their success as leaders. The Republic is as far from Turkish youth as Leyla ¹⁷. The nation awaits Leyla with a longing that grows every day. They will find that beauty, which is being kept from them, sooner or later, even if it is to be found in the mountain of Kaf ¹⁸ » [Öktülmüs, 1998]. The young people of the 1990s, on the other hand, may not be awaiting « Leyla » anymore, as Turkish society is increasingly fragmented at the wake of the millennium.

After the Marmara earthquake of August 1999, young persons from a variety of backgrounds and ideological persuasions were at the forefront of efforts to organize

13 Only the initials of minors appear in newspaper accounts.

14 A neighbourhood in Istanbul frequented by street children.

15 A reference to claims that police operations secure public « peace ».

16 A rewording of a line from a famous poem by the Turkish poet Nazım Hikmet. The original line reads, « The most beautiful child is the one that has not yet grown ».

17 A reference to the object of Mecnun's affection in the well-known mystical love story, Leyla and Mecnun.

18 The magical mountain of fairytales, where braves must fight giants to save their beloved.

relief for victims, belying their representation in the media as selfish, apolitical individuals. The experience of the earthquake displayed the bankruptcy of the current political system as well as of conventional political categories, as young people from all walks of life worked together with local and transnational NGO's. However, despite the success of NGO's in providing relief for the earthquake victims, the development of a more participatory public sphere in the long term is predicated upon the restructuring of a political system which amounts to a gerontocracy. Is it a coincidence that most leaders of political parties are in their seventies, while the majority of the population is below the age of 25? The « mission » of youth in the 21st century might be to reject the mission of transforming society from above and to work towards the joint action of global citizens to create a society more tolerant of difference.

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In this article, I analysed the construction of youth in public discourse in Turkey in three periods since the establishment of the Republic. I argued that in the 1923-1950 period, youth came to embody the new nation. In the 1950-1980 period, youth were reconstructed in public discourse as rebels. Despite the change in discourse, educated young people in these two periods continued to identify with the mission of building a new nation in the name of « the people ». The post-1980 period, on the other hand, constitutes a rupture with modernist constructions of youth. Today, young people are increasingly able to express themselves through the new media, challenging their construction in public discourse, the established hierarchy between elders and juniors, and the mission imposed on them by adult society. This suggests that the construction of age in Turkish society may be changing in the current period.

The fact that youth came to be perceived as a distinct stage in the life course is linked to the history of modernity in Europe. Was Western society unique in accentuating the gulf between children and adults? Recent studies of non-Western experiences with modernity suggest referring to modernity in the plural to account for the historicity of these alternate experiences. This article suggests that studies of youth, which largely focus on age-based subcultures, can benefit from a wider frame of age, life cycle and generation.

The Turkish experience shows that the concept of generation is particularly useful in the study of societies characterized by rapid social change, a powerful intelligentsia, the centrality of collective identity in the construction of subjectivity, and the maintenance of historical notions of age during the process of adoption of modernist constructions of youth.

In the last decade, transnationalism, the dismantling of the welfare state, and the rise of identity politics have necessitated new approaches and new methodologies in the study of youth. Globalization has blurred previous distinctions between North and South, and between regions. Jean and John Comaroff [forthcoming] have suggested that youth embody the contradictions of late capitalism, constituting a new counter or « alien-nation » outside the modern nation-state as we know it. Young people the world over are caught between disillusionment with the promises

of the nation-state and the hope of greater participation in what has become a transnational public sphere – requiring new definitions of citizenship as well as of adulthood. The issue for youth today, then, is how to achieve (or maintain) the promises of modernity, including an inclusive social democracy, within the conditions of neo-liberal globalization.

There is growing interest in Turkey today in memories of the past, including life histories, autobiographies and biographies, as identities are increasingly narrowed down into the space of the self/body – even members of the Islamist movement of the 1980s have begun to publish their memoirs [Oguzhan, 1998]. Mass-based youth subcultures with links to the diaspora are emerging. There is a need for in-depth ethnographic studies of young people of the post-1980 generation. There are still few studies of the Islamist, Kurdish nationalist, Alevi, Kurdish, neo-Kemalist and Turkish nationalist movements from an age-based perspective, given that young people are disproportionately represented in these movements. Such studies, may ask, for example, how do these social movements differ from collective movements in previous periods in Republican history? How are they shaped by the new subjectivity and the global hybrid youth culture which marks the contemporary period? What are the links between new social movements, NGO's, youth subcultures, and the new media? Ongoing research on the effects of the Marmara earthquake as well as new studies of/by young people will shed further light on the meaning and experience of being young in Turkey and in the diaspora. It is only by shedding the burden of the mission imposed on them that youth can become « young ». Otherwise, as Tuna Kiremitçi puts it, they are doomed to « get younger as we die » [Kiremitçi, 1998: 32].

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