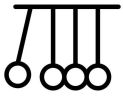


TURKEY'S UNHEARD VOICES

Türkiye'deki Sosyal Çürüme

POLITICS

Ali Küçük



Abstract

Social disruption, a term used in sociology, refers to the breakdown of social life and the fading of ethical norms within society. It represents the shift in the characteristics and beliefs that once defined a community, as the concept of ethics slowly fades from social life.

According to Britannica, ethics is the discipline concerned with what is morally good or bad, and morally right or wrong. Examples of ethical principles include honesty, loyalty, transparency, and refraining from harmful activities such as assault, murder, fraud, and theft.

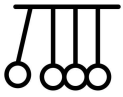
Social Disruption

In a street interview where the question "How is the economy?" was asked, Prof. Dr. Zeliha Burtek responded: "Right now, there is social disruption in Turkey. The economy can always recover, but you cannot make social disruption turn around. It's very, very hard. We are at a place with no return. And social disruption is where what we call 'ethics' fades. Ethics is the philosophy of life. Think about Turkish literature, Turkish cinema, Turkish theatre arts, and so on. In none of these masterpieces can you see anything related to immigrant culture, mafias, or money laundering. However, right now, especially in books, series, movies, etc., we are beginning to see these things and slowly shifting away from our culture. We were not a South American country, but we are turning into one. We have become another society."

Dr. Zeliha Burtek graduated from Yıldız Technical University as an architect, completed her Ph.D. in Sociology at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University (MSGSÜ), and holds a master's degree in Philosophy from Galatasaray University. She is an animal lover and deeply cares for the high number of stray animals in Turkey. She gained considerable fame and attention for her wise words during a street interview in Mecidiyekoy, Istanbul, near the Metrobus, where she eloquently explained what was happening in the country.

Dr. Burtek stated that everybody thinks they can do everything by themselves. She shared two real-life examples from her own experiences to illustrate the social disruption happening in the country.

The first example was: "One time, I went to have a meeting with the rector of a university. We didn't get a chance to talk much, and the rector kept constantly repeating that he/she knows the best about everything. 'I know the best of everything,' she kept repeating."



After giving this example, she commented: "Everybody has begun to think they can do things that are way beyond their capability, capacity, existence, and professional knowledge. Everybody thinks they can do everything by themselves. But they do not do this consciously."

The second example was: "I went to talk about a topic with a mayor. Municipality means service. (It's not the government; it's based on public service.) But unfortunately, our mayors, at least the ones I have had meetings with previously, talk to us as if they are running the government."

In the interview, she explained that she went to the municipality to offer a project she wanted to turn into reality. But when she told the mayor about it, the mayor responded in a rude way, saying, "Am I really going to use the government's money for this!?"

Dr. Burtek commented on how they prioritize services that feel closer to them and have a higher chance of increasing their chances of winning the next election. They see the government's money as something to use for services that will make their own advertisements. But when it comes to the real services that citizens are actually asking for, they say, "Am I really going to use the government's money for this!?"

After sharing the examples above, Burtek said: "People, no matter where they work, are already aware that there is a 'disruption' going on, and that there is no turning back from it at this point."

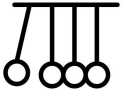
"Even a regime wouldn't be able to do this," she added.

Burtek stated that now we have left religious, moral, and relational disruptions behind. The disruption going on now is much more internalized. "If there were a regime in Turkey right now, even that regime wouldn't be able to make such a transformation," said Burtek. This disruption has spread and been internalized by people in every field in a shorter time than any regime could cause.

In the same interview, Dr. Burtek was asked, "Why do people in Turkey care so much about astrology?" She answered, "Because when we cannot clearly see what is in front of us and our future, rather than actually looking ahead, we refer to astrology."

"Although astrology is a big part of popular culture, it is also a branch of science. It plays an important role in reducing our worries about the uncertainties of our futures, but it does so in a sweet and innocent way. However, with the spread of portable internet, there are many people who call themselves astrologists but are just spreading nonsense on the internet. Astrology motivates you, and if this motivation adds hope to your life, it's good. But if it traps you in an infinite loop, then it's something bad," Dr. Burtek added.

Why Can't We Dynamize the Disruption?



Dr. Burtek on this topic said: “We can’t dynamize social disruption because we are a society that has not yet obtained individuality. If every individual questions their own disruption, then we as a society can say ‘stop’ to the ignorance of the disruption, and a ‘style’ will be created.”

(The word ‘style’ here refers to the manner or approach of individuals — *üslup* in Turkish.) “Right now, in traffic, in conversations, in relationships, we don’t have any style. And this lack of style spoils the true nature of the disruption and turns it into something bad,” Dr. Burtek said in her interview on national TV channel Sözcü.

"If everyone just internalizes and reflects on their own disruption, then this country can heal. But we don’t have any intention to use our mirror that will show us that path," she added.

The ‘İzmarit’ Problem

According to a study by Anglia Ruskin University in the UK, it was revealed that the most common harmful waste thrown into nature is cigarette butts, which make up 30-40% of the litter collected from cities and shores. The study also found that approximately 4.5 trillion cigarette butts are discarded annually worldwide.

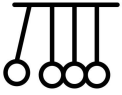
In 2016, Turkey ranked 10th in the world for the highest number of smokers, with 24% of the population smoking. According to a 2008 study, 11.4% of boys and 4.4% of girls aged 13-15 were smokers, with an average of 8.4%.

As mentioned earlier, ethics means morals. Respecting others and nature is part of this.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 30% of male deaths and 12% of female deaths in Turkey are caused by cigarettes. WHO also states that two-thirds of cigarette butts are littered on the ground. This accumulates to approximately 4.5 trillion cigarette butts per year worldwide. Cigarette butts are made of cellulose acetate, which does not decompose for years, causing significant environmental damage.

As someone who lives in Istanbul and uses the metro daily, I see endless amounts of cigarette butts on the ground, even in one of the most developed areas of the city. I personally find them very disturbing and feel bad for those who have to clean them. I have even seen people throwing cigarette butts on the ground next to those cleaning them.

To solve this issue, we must first start by respecting both people and nature.



Books Are Not Even Mentioned in Turkey

An article by Çukurova University in Turkey, published by İ. Gürşen Kafkas in the Cumhuriyet Newspaper, highlights that in EU countries (which Turkey is trying to join), there is one library per 7,500 people. In contrast, Turkey has only one library per 51,000 people. Despite this, do we still read books? According to a comparison by the Japanese, if someone reads less than four books a year, it is considered nothing; 4-10 books is mild reading; 10-20 books is normal; and reading more than 20 books a year means they are a 'heavy reader.' Turkish author Deniz Kavukçuoğlu stated that 4.2 billion books are printed per year in Japan. However, this number drops significantly to 23.5 billion books per year in Turkey. The number of books printed in Japan in one day is approximately equal to the total number of books printed in Turkey in an entire year. (For reference, Japan's population is about 125 million, while Turkey's population is over 85 million.) While there are 7-8 books per person in developed countries, books are scarcely mentioned in Turkey, let alone read. In Turkey, only 4-5 people out of every 100 read books.

Tınaz Titiz also reported that only 0.1% of the society in Turkey are active readers. Books rank 235th in the social life hierarchy. Seventy-five percent of society does not read books, and 40% have never visited a library. A large portion of the 40% who have visited libraries mostly go for tests or school books.

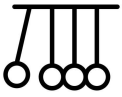
A study by Prof. Dr. Çağatay Özdemir, titled 'The Learning Elements in Turkey,' found that 16% of university students in Turkey do not read books at all. Approximately 72% read one or two books, 11% read three to five books, and only 1.1% read more than five books per year — a fifth of the number of books that the average Japanese reads. To be considered a 'good reader' globally, one must read at least 10-20 books annually. Author Deniz Kavukçuoğlu noted that the ratio of those pursuing higher education in Turkey has increased 14 times since 1965, yet those enrolled today read fewer books than graduates in 1965. He describes Turkey as "a country where reading-disabled people live."

According to a study by GFK Panel Research, young people between the ages of 15-24 in Turkey do not read. Sixty-one percent of young people do not remember the last magazine they read, and 50% do not recall the last book they read.

Narin and Sıla

Two very innocent children. One killed, one raped.

Narin Güran was only 8 years old when her dead body was found in the Eğertutmaz Stream on Sunday, September 8, 19 days after she went missing. Narin had disappeared in the Bağlar district of the southeastern Turkish city of Diyarbakır. Lawyer Nahit Eren, in a BBC article, stated, "Narin's body was deformed after 19 days, so determining the cause of death will depend on the biological and pathological research results." Ninety-one samples were



taken from Narin's corpse to investigate various crimes, including sexual assault. There were no signs of cutting, stabbing, or gunshot wounds, and no internal bleeding in her body. However, her left leg was severed below the knee.

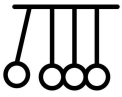
Narin's uncle, Salim Güran, was the first suspect, as DNA samples from his vehicle matched Narin's clothing before she was even found. Güran was arrested on charges of 'possible premeditated murder and deprivation of liberty.' He denies the accusations of killing Narin and claimed he deleted his WhatsApp messages after Narin's disappearance to hide that he had been messaging with sex workers. The second major suspect was Nevzat Bahtiyar, a construction worker and headman of the province, who stated, "Salim Güran offered me 200,000 Turkish Lira to dispose of the body in his car." Bahtiyar also stated that he and Güran together placed the corpse in a sack and buried it under a tree by the Eğertutmaz Stream. He added, "I don't plan on surrendering since I wasn't the one who killed the child."

In 2009, Narin's sister, Tülin Güran, passed away due to a lung infection that caused respiratory failure. However, there are claims that she died from falling down stairs. Cem Özkeskin, on Sözcü Television, shared anonymous claims that Narin had witnessed something that Turkish society couldn't handle. According to these claims, Narin's death was planned because she had seen something she wasn't supposed to see, and people feared she might tell others.

Another question is: Did the child want this? No. No child, no person, would want this. Every child deserves loving parents. It is their most vital resource.

Now, to talk about the baby. I repeat, a baby. Two years old. Perhaps unable to walk or talk properly yet. Still at the age where she doesn't know the alphabet. Raped. The words "baby" and "rape" in the same sentence hurt both my and your heart. But it happened, and again, it is our responsibility as humans to scream as loudly as possible so the world hears this. So the world might do something about it.

Sıla was only two when she was sexually assaulted. HaberGlobal reporter Sümeyye Yılancı began her night shift with these words: "My trembling voice remains the same, even though I try to shake off the news I just learned. It's impossible. She is a little child in Tekirdağ, Malkara, a two-year-old baby girl. The family of baby Sıla brought her to the hospital, claiming that a television had fallen on her, but it was later revealed that the television hadn't fallen on her. This baby had been beaten before, had bruises on her body, and had been tortured. We didn't want to think the worst, but it was later confirmed that, according to the forensic medicine report, Sıla had been sexually abused. It's terrible to combine the words 'baby' and 'abuse.' Yes, we live in a terrible age. In these days when we mourn Narin, we now mourn little Sıla, and these are just the cases we know. Who knows how many more there are?"



70 Gün

According to a recent study, the average person spends 4 hours and 37 minutes on their phone each day, which equals over one day per week or six days per month. This adds up to approximately 70 days per year. The average Gen Z teenager spends about 6 hours and 5 minutes on their phone daily, and 56% of them feel and are aware of their addiction to it. This addiction negatively affects productivity and the culture of greetings. Many people, including me, procrastinate and don't complete their work on time because they spend that time scrolling on social media.

To give a real-life example, once during exam week in 2023, I had a Biology exam the next day. I came home and told myself, "I'll just lie down and look at Instagram for 15 minutes." Many 15-minute intervals passed, and eventually, I got up from bed 2.5 hours later. I had to study very late at night and missed sleep for my exam the next day, leading to the lowest biology grade I've ever received — 24 points lower than my last grade.

According to the Business World Report prepared by TeamLease, a company providing human resources services, the average time employees spend on social media while at work is 2 hours and 21 minutes. The report states that 13% of total productivity is lost due to social media addiction alone. The negative effects of social media use at work go beyond this, as it contributes to the spread of personal information, slander, and misinformation.

Greeting is an act of communication where individuals acknowledge each other's presence to show attention and suggest a relationship. However, with the rise of social media addiction worldwide, we are losing the culture of greeting.