

A YEAR IN THE LIFE: ADVENTURES IN BRITISH SUBCULTURES

Hayatta Bir Yıl: İngiliz Alt Kültürlerinde Maceralar

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ABSTRACT

A Year in the Life: Adventures in British Subcultures (2022), written by Lucy Leonelli, is an engaging journey through twenty-six British subcultures undertaken over twelve months. In doing so, Leonelli meets numerous individuals and characters from various subcultural communities, ranging from battle re-enactors to Goths, Morris Dancers to trainspotters, and ufologists to extreme sportspeople. This inquisitive author seeks to discover what divides cultural tribes and unites humanity, how to make sense of it all, and understand herself better.

Keywords: culture, identity, leisure, society, subculture.

Öz

Lucy Leonelli tarafından yazılan *Hayattan Bir Yıl: İngiliz Alt Kültürlerinde Maceralar (2022)*, on iki ay boyunca gerçekleştirilen yirmi altı İngiliz alt kültürü arasında ilgi çekici bir yolculuktur. Bunu yaparken Leonelli, savaşı yeniden canlandıranlardan Gotlara, Morris dansçılarından tren gözcülerine ve Ufologlardan ekstrem sporculara kadar çeşitli alt kültür topluluklarından çok sayıda kişi ve karakterle tanışır. Bu meraklı yazar, kültürel kabileleri bölen ve insanlığı birleştiren şeyin ne olduğunu, tüm bunları nasıl anlamlandıracağını ve kendini daha iyi nasıl anlayacağını keşfetmeye çalışıyor.

Anahtar Sözcükler: kültür, kimlik, boş zaman, toplum, alt kültür.

Leonelli, Lucy (2022). *A Year in The Life: Adventures in British Subcultures*. London: Unbound.

A Year in the Life: Adventures in British Subcultures (2022), written by Lucy Leonelli, is an engaging journey through twenty-six British subcultures undertaken over twelve months. In doing so, Leonelli meets numerous individuals and characters from various subcultural communities, ranging from battle re-enactors to Goths, Morris Dancers to trainspotters, and ufologists

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to extreme sportspeople. This inquisitive author seeks to discover what divides cultural tribes and unites humanity, how to make sense of it, and understand herself better.

So, what is Leonelli's motivation for writing this book? She reports spending a decade climbing the career ladder to become an executive headhunting firm abroad in the United States. However, she felt there was still more to explore and discover socially and culturally. Life had more to offer if only she could experience it. Leonelli moved out of her comfort zone and actively engaged with all twenty-six communities at a local level, meeting some passionate and colourful British citizens. She comments: "... my purpose was to discover and infiltrate the fascinating communities of Great Britain; to demystify its subcultures... investigating each community and immersing myself in their ritual and customs" (2022: 3). Leonelli defines subculture as a "Subdivision of national culture or an enclave within it with a distinct integrated network of behaviour, beliefs and attitudes" (front inside page).

The book contains twenty-six short chapters arranged alphabetically. Leonelli's research method is participant-observer, using semi-structured and structured interviews (with some names changed to protect privacy). The work contains no index or photographs. The content can be divided into three themes: the disillusionment of modernity and seeking solace in the subcultures, the author's experience while visiting each subcultural community, and the individuals with whom the author interacts and communicates at each subcultural site. The author has selected a strong dose of non-Abrahamic spiritual representation in the subcultures, with chapters on Otherkin, Pagans, Wiccans and Yogis.

In summing up her year of exploration, she remarks 'writing about this book has taught me about the importance of community in an increasingly isolating society, about the unquenchable human thirst for a sense of belonging, about the misguided trust we put in our own world view' (2022: 364). She notes, "I have learnt that human beings are excellent at finding increasingly inventive ways to socialise" (2022: 364). Leonelli sees the tribe instinct as "ingrained in humanity, though we need to be open, flexible, and curious" about outsiders (2022: 365). The book exemplifies how we can learn about ourselves by opening up to new social groups, people, and situations. The author has the insight to see the bigger picture of humanity and analyse the diversity of subcultures while respecting them, saying: "It's all

connected, you see. All of it. A tapestry of humanity made from different threads that weave and dance around each other” (2022: 366).

Leonelli has undertaken a research project of significant breadth, is a good writer, and succinctly explains the rationale and purpose of each sub-culture. This is despite the time limitations while researching and word space restrictions while writing. Overall, her time management skills and brevity are commendable, and the reader is left with a feel for most of the communities explored. One key strength is Leonelli’s ability to describe each community and write a precise case study while integrating individuals’ dissatisfaction with the alienating side of modernity and the loss of community in twenty-first-century Great Britain (and in industrialised and post-industrial societies generally). The author’s insights on this matter are thought-provoking. Also, connections are made between the subcultures. For instance, the physicality of the circus performers is comparable with the sportspeople of extreme sports, and the battle re-enactors with the live-action role-playing gamers. In Chapter Twelve, the Zeitgeist Movement, established in 2008, comes in for criticism by the author. Overall, the book is well-written, humorous in places (especially the chapters on dog-showing, hill-baggers, naturism, trainspotters, and Paganism) and wide-ranging in its coverage of subcultures in British culture.

However, the book has some things that could be improved. Despite the national scope of the case studies, there needs to be more inclusion of the multicultural nature of British society in the book. No subcultural community among the Black, Muslim, Hindu or Sikh was selected as a case study or commented upon in detail. For this reason, the book feels like its target audience is mainstream White British society. One exception is London’s Kabbalah Centre, which has Jewish origins; Leonelli visits this subculture. Kiaan (discussed in the ‘Otherkin’ chapter) is the exception; his parents originated from Bangladesh. Other British non-mainstream cultures – often linked with music, youth, and distinctive dress – are not included in the research, such as the 1960s-era Mods, the Skinheads, the Punk rockers, the Bikers and Hell’s Angels, and the 1950s-era Teddy Boys.

The world of Gypsy Romany and Irish Travellers’ involvement with fun-fairs is likewise not described. In addition, in some of the subcultures studied, the content about historical origins and participants’ comments analysis is limited. Likewise, the debate about class issues – notably in Chapter One about Britain’s aristocracy – might have been developed further. In most cases, the emphasis is on the author’s experience; in all fairness, Leo-

nelli mentions this approach at the beginning of the book. However, this leaves the interviewees' voices restricted. An exception can be made for the circus folk stories, which reveal how this world functions in some detail. Perhaps the limiting of interlocators' voices is the price paid to accommodate twenty-six subcultures in one book.

Leonelli's book is recommended for general readers of British society, particularly England. It is also suitable as a research source for undergraduate and graduate students of British subcultures, social change and transformation and identity, and cultural associations and communities in post-industrial Western societies.

References

Leonelli, Lucy (2022). *A Year in The Life: Adventures in British Subcultures*. London: Unbound.

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