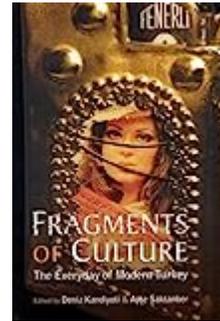




**Deniz Kandiyoti, Ayse Saktanber, eds.** *Fragments of Culture: The Everyday of Modern Turkey*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002. ix + 350 pp. \$25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8135-3082-6; \$60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8135-3081-9.



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## A Thick Description of Fragments of Culture in Turkey

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*Fragments of Culture* is a much-needed volume for students and scholars of Turkish studies, bringing together articles that examine different aspects of everyday life in Turkey, ranging from urban residential styles and gender and class hierarchies in shopping and education to folk-dancing, Islamic fashion shows, and a community of transsexuals in Istanbul. This collection is only the second comprehensive work on society and culture in Turkey available, after Sibel Bozdogan and Rezat Kasaba's edited *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey* (1997), that responds to the needs of both researchers and teachers. However, in contrast to Bozdogan and Kasaba's volume, which successfully brings together scholars from different disciplines discussing a single theme, namely Turkish modernity, *Fragments of Culture* lacks such interdisciplinarity and thematic focus.

Providing a thoughtful and insightful introduction, Deniz Kandiyoti frames the collection as an investigation into "the mutual 'culturisation' of politics and 'politicisation' of culture [that] can only be interpreted through a

serious engagement with emerging arenas of subcultural expression and cultural production" (p. 5). Indeed, each of the individual essays focuses on a particular cultural "fragment" and most of them provide a thick description of the production of culture, and related class and gender hierarchies. Since none of the authors actually provides a clear definition of how they understand politics or engages in an analytical discussion as to how culture is politicized, the collection does not live up to the larger frame promised by Kandiyoti.

In her introduction, Kandiyoti also situates the collection within postcolonial and poststructuralist criticism, thereby appealing to an interdisciplinary audience interested in critical approaches to culture and politics. The fact that the cultural context under investigation is Turkey makes this promise all the more appealing, since, as Kandiyoti notes herself, critical studies of culture and politics have suffered from confining their scope to the "post-industrial West" (p. 17). In sum, the reader is left to expect not only an illumination of the cultural landscape of Turkey, but a more substantial contribution to postcolonial scholarship and poststructuralist theory in gen-

eral. Likewise, in the afterword, Martin Stokes locates the collection within Turkish cultural studies as a newly emerging field of scholarship. However, cultural studies is not simply about the study of culture. Cultural studies, mostly inspired by poststructuralist criticism, emerged in response to the need to develop a more fluid understanding of culture that can only be studied from multiple perspectives beyond the confines of a particular discipline and with multiple methodologies. Hence cultural studies emerged in liminal spaces between different academic disciplines and has created controversy exactly because of its interdisciplinarity and call for the employment of flexible and multiple methodologies, where textual analysis often plays a central role. In this sense, *none* of the articles in the *Fragments of Culture* would actually qualify as “cultural studies,” since none of them takes up an interdisciplinary perspective, employs multiple methodologies, or takes up a textual analysis of any sort (with the exception of Ayse Oncu’s essay). Instead, they are firmly grounded in either sociological methodology (survey and interviews) or anthropology (participant observation and in-depth interviews). A textual analysis is not employed even where it is most appropriate, as in chapter 7, which looks at an instance from Turkish cinema (namely, “T=rkan Soray’s rise to stardom”) where one would expect some analysis of Soray’s films, or perhaps media discourse on stardom. Yet this essay does not go beyond a description of Soray’s public image and a rather conventional survey of socio-economic background conditions that gave rise to this image.

I wholeheartedly agree with Deniz Kandiyoti that in order to study the social and cultural complexities of a country like Turkey one has to break free of variants of modernization theory and take up more critical approaches offered mostly by postcolonial studies and poststructuralist criticism. I would like to stress, however, that this undertaking also places the responsibility on scholars of Turkish studies to more rigorously engage social and cultural theory and criticism, and to more explicitly state the theoretical underpinnings and implications of their work. Postcolonial scholarship does offer new and more critical ways of studying social, political, and cultural complexities in Turkey, but Turkish studies can and should also contribute to postcolonial literature, poststructuralist criticism, and social and cultural theory in general. Had this collection addressed these theoretical questions and debates more rigorously, *Fragments of Culture* would have been a much more powerful book that could be useful in teaching and research, not only in Turkish studies but also in postcolonial scholarship and

cultural studies in general.

Apart from the loosely drawn framework in the introduction, there are no guiding questions or specific thematic foci. Kandiyoti thoughtfully justifies the authors’ reasons for engaging in a close study of cultural fragments, but more specific concerns, questions, or approaches common to the fourteen articles are not articulated. Some of the authors use consumption, class, and gender as important analytical categories in their analysis, while others, such as Serif Mardin or Arzu Ozturkmen, do not; instead they address questions regarding nationalism and nation-building. Moreover, the authors who use class as an analytical category have very different and rather incompatible understandings of the concept. For example, while Jenny White tends to use class as a socio-economic category, Yael Navaro-Yashin uses it in a Bourdieuan sense to refer to cultural distinction and the construction of cultural difference. Furthermore, chapter 5 by Mardin and chapter 14 by Lale Yalcin-Heckmann do not really belong in this collection, since the former is not about a fragment of culture, and the latter is not about Turkey.

Sencer Ayata examines the retreat of the “suburban middle classes” to “site” type residences (similar to condominiums), that became the norm in suburban Ankara in the 1990s, based on survey research and interviews conducted with “site” residents. Gul Ozyegin also utilizes survey techniques to study “doorkeeper” (janitor) families, who live and work in “middle-class” neighborhoods of Ankara, and their interactions with employing residents. Both of these chapters shed light on the specifics of class relations and the production of class hierarchies in Turkey. However, the use of the concept of “middle-class” by both authors is rather problematic since it is not defined or theorized; thus “class” appears not as an analytical category but only as a term vaguely descriptive of socio-economic status. As illustrated by both Navaro-Yashin’s work in this collection and Ayse Oncu’s elsewhere, class is a category exceptionally mediated by culture in Turkey, where socio-economic status plays only a secondary or indirect role, and such unaccounted uses of the term “class” and class hierarchies conceal more interesting and culturally specific dynamics.[1]

Durakbasa and Cindoglu provide their observation of shopping malls as a newly developing site of consumption since the 1980s in relation to the reproduction of class, gender, and age hierarchies. Feride Acar and Ayse Ayata compare three high schools: an Imam Hatip Lycee as a religious vocational school, a private and prestigious

school, and a public school. They observe that while the first two provide their pupils with a strong sense of identity and vision for the future, grounded in religion and a secular modern life-style respectively, the public school, suffering from an insufficiency of funds, lacks such vision and identity. The authors successfully illustrate the ways in which gender and sexuality play a central role in the socialization of students into adult roles, which is particularly interesting in the Imam Hatip Lycee, where controlling male sexuality plays a central role in the organization of relations and the construction of a sense of belonging.

Serif Mardin examines the development of vernacular Turkish in the nineteenth century *before* the establishment of the new nation-state and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's famous 1932 language reform that institutionalized Turkish as the national language. Hence Mardin makes a case against Benedict Anderson, who asserts that national languages were standardized by nationalist elites, and instead suggests that language may indeed have primordial aspects serving nationalistic uses. Mardin's insightful and thought-provoking essay does not really belong to this collection, since it neither looks at a fragment of culture nor makes use of class, gender, or consumerism as an analytical category that is common to most of the other essays.

Tracing the development of folk dancing, Ozturkmen argues that the organization of teams and naming of dances, based on location or region rather than ethnicity, contributed to nation-building practices. Ayse Oncu, on the other hand, examines the development of the *maganda* type in popular satirical magazines as an illustration of the way in which "commercialization of sexuality as a form of spectacle has pervaded everyday lives of different groups" (p. 187). Oncu's insightful essay makes the unconventional observation that male sexuality, as represented in the grotesque figure of the *maganda*, emerges as an important medium for the formulation of new gender identities, urban subjectivities, and class relations.

Chapters 9, 10, and 11, by Jenny White, Yael Navaro-Yashin, and Ayse Saktanber, respectively, look at different "fragments" of Islamicism. Both White and Navaro-Yashin offer ethnographic studies of different Islamist groups in relation to the significance and function of the Islamic headcovering and "politics of identity," but arrive at very different conclusions. White studies a rally organized by Turkey's main Islamist political party during the mid-1990s, the Refah/Fazilet Party, and concludes that "identity politics" cannot adequately account for Is-

lamist mobilization as symbolized by the Islamic head-covering, where socioeconomic class still seems to be an important organizing principle. Navaro-Yashin looks at the development of the Islamic fashion industry, led by one of the main business companies in the field, Tekbir, which claims to be "the trademark of Islam." However, Tekbir is highly criticized, especially by Islamist intellectuals, for monopolizing Islam and diluting the "struggle." While Navaro-Yashin concludes that the battle between Islamists and secularists is waged through the medium of consumption, her own account points to a different battle, one waged within Islamist circles themselves. Yet it is not elaborated on or even acknowledged as a form of struggle by the author. For both of these authors, even though "identity politics" is frequently used in their discussion, neither defines nor theorizes the phrase. Indeed, what is actually political about the headcovering, how it is or is not related to identity, what exactly is the nature of the battle between Islamists and secularists, and what is at stake in this battle are not accounted for by either author.

Deniz Kandiyoti's ethnographic study of the male-to-female transsexuals in Istanbul is a wonderfully written essay that brings forth several thought-provoking questions about the dissolution of boundaries and norms on gender, sexuality, national belonging, citizenship, and consequent state interventions to regulate gender and sexuality. Unfortunately, Kandiyoti does not elaborate on the boundaries that are threatened by the very existence of transsexuals, thereby tempting the state to intervene, sometimes brutally, to regulate their lives and suppress their visibility. The issue of globalization, only briefly touched upon by Kandiyoti, also deserves more elaboration, since her account illustrates the complicated ways in which globalized images, networks, and relations offer different means and opportunities for empowering the otherwise marginalized community of transsexuals against the authority and interventions of the overbearing state.

Finally, the last two chapters, by Ayse Simsek Caglar and Lale Yalcin-Heckmann, both look at Turkish immigrants in Germany. Caglar examines differential expectations and upward mobility aspirations of Turkish families in Germany and Turkey by comparing different living-room use and decoration styles of the same families in the two countries. Yalcin-Heckmann examines Turkish immigrant youth culture in Germany and discusses the dilemma of bearing hyphenated identities, such as the German-Turk, which, on the one hand, tends to reify ethnic-national identity categories but, on the

other hand, “empowers them as belonging to two cultures, encompassing both, not torn between them” (p. 315). Well illustrated and thoughtfully written as it is, Yalcin-Heckmann’s chapter is another essay that does not belong to this collection, for it is not about Turkey nor about Turkish studies, but about Germany.

Note

[1]. Ayse Oncu, “Istanbulites and Others: The Cultural Cosmology of Being Middle Class in the Era of Globalism,” in *Istanbul: Between the Global and the Local*, ed. Caglar Keyder (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), pp. 95-119.

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