

Reseñas de publicaciones

Orienting Istanbul: Cultural Capital of Europe?

Edited by Deniz Göktürk, Levent Soysal and Ipek Türeli, London: Routledge: 2010.

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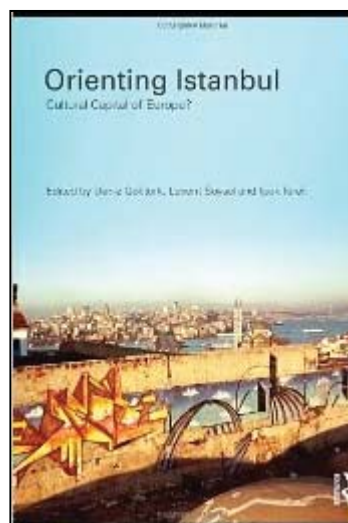
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Recently, the city of Istanbul has become the subject, the pivot of the narrative, or the constitutive setting for many books, in Turkish or in English, fiction or social science, monographs or edited volumes (Eckard, 2008; Guvenc, 2009; Keyder, 1999; Keyder 2010; Magden 2005; Mills 2010; Navaro-Yashin, 2002; Pamuk, 2006; Perouse, 2011; Safak, 2000; Stokes, 2010; Tugal, 2009; Yardimci, 2005). In these works, Istanbul has been represented as the unique showcase of the contemporary Turkish culture: Cosmopolitan, multilayered, commercialized, privatized, ambiguous, perplexing, incoherent, dangerous, segregated, and full of intricate relations that urban citizens have to navigate through. Culture has long been a problematical term for social scientists, as the city for urban analysts, and Istanbul for all those who have endeavored to understand and interpret Turkey. Thus, a single volume that brings together the different aspects of “cultural life in Istanbul” in a multidimensional and interdisciplinary manner was both an obvious need and an ambitious task. *Orienting Istanbul* claims to satisfy this need with its all-embracing content and opportune timing, when Istanbul was endorsed as one of the three European cultural capitals of the year 2010.

The book consists of five sections with an introduction and an epilogue. The three editors present the rationale and the road-

map of the book in the comprehensive introductory chapter. Istanbul has recently gained a global visibility among the art circles mainly because of novels and the (urban) memoir of the Nobel prized author Orhan Pamuk and films of Nuri Bilge Ceylan, who won two Cannes Film Festival awards in 2008 and 2011, and Fatih Akin, a Hamburg based Turkish director, who won a Golden Bear award at Berlin Film Festival in 2004. Based on these and other successful stories of urban cultural renewal, *Orienting Istanbul* is presented as “the first book to capture Istanbul’s rise to the world stage set by post-industrial capitalism. It offers new insights into the representation of Istanbul as a city of culture,



history, and diversity” (pp. 3-4). As an inevitable part of the logic behind the book, this rising cultural city phenomenon is explicated with the process of Turkey’s integration to the European Union, or “European Culture”, if there is one. As parallel to the contested history of the recent Europeanization of Istanbul, the editors in the introduction also highlight the imperial city and its remnants in contemporary Istanbul, (for example ways of remembering the Ottoman capital), as well as the transformations the city passed through in the last century under the authority of the nation-state. Istanbul’s last wave of urban transformation has been experienced since the early 1980s as the city has gradually become more open to globalization and neoliberalization policies. In this process, Istanbul has deindustrialized to a large extent and ‘the culture industry’ in addition to finance and service sectors has risen despite the fact that Turkey in general, and the urban economy of Istanbul in particular, are still significantly behind Europe in terms of generating employment in and revenues from cultural industries.

The first section of the book includes two chapters. The most renowned scholar who writes about Istanbul, Caglar Keyder, provides a critical introduction to the debates around globalization and land use in Istanbul. In the next chapter, Engin Isin, as a result of his observations in various city-scapes, advocates that Istanbul should not only be seen as a city of melancholia and sadness but also as a communal space of joy and pleasure. The Second section of the book starts with a sociological study by Tuna Kuyucu and Ozlem Unsal on spatial transformations, housing policies, gentrification and the role of the state and local government in the re-making of the city. The following chapter focuses on Eminönü district, which is the historical core of the city with a rather contradictory industrial past, and ‘han’ as a specific Ottoman setting, redefined and reordered as ‘cultural heritage’ today. Chapter five by Jeremy Walton presents the author’s outsider perspectives on the debate of the Islamic city and reconfiguring Islamic parts of the town. The last chapter of this section introduces “MiniaTurk”—a miniature park space constructed and managed by the Istanbul metropolitan municipality full with model buildings and structures that represent and mediate material as well as symbolic boundaries of the Turkish nation-state.

The third section is devoted to examine cinematic works from and about Istanbul. The first chapter of this part, by Nezih Erdogan, takes a closer

look at how the art of cinema played tangible and intangible roles in the linkage between modernity and the city. The next chapter animates a migrants’ viewpoint of Istanbul through two films from 1960s and 2000s. Deniz Bayraktar and Elif Akcali in chapter nine analyze the aerial filming of the city in the movie *Magic Carpet Ride* as a departure point to understand the intricate webs of relations that both the film uses as its subject matter and the city contributes as its social thread. In the last chapter of this part, Deniz Gokturk concentrates on Fatih Akin’s recent documentary on Istanbul’s diverse musical culture and uses the metaphor of ‘bridge’ as a projection for the de-territorialized spectatorship of the new, digital era. The fourth section of the book focuses another setting in which arts and the city relate, the Istanbul Biennial, with an interview and two essays. The curator of the Tenth Istanbul Biennial Hou Hanru is interviewed for the book and this conversation is complemented with the seasoned art scholar and practicing artist Jale Erzen’s meditations on Istanbul’s time travel in terms of art scene and yet another chapter that compares Istanbul Biennial with Berlin Biennial and the two different urban cultural milieus that art is positioned.

The last part of the book concerns Turkey’s serpentine Europeanization processes and Istanbul’s naming as one of the three European cultural capitals of the year 2010. The section opens with a discussion about the European Capital of Culture Programme by Carola Hein and continues with a report about Istanbul’s temporary cultural capital status by Oguz Oner, who is a specialist at the Programme’s Istanbul agency. On her part, Marcy Brink-Danan portrays Istanbul’s Jewish population and their participation to urban culture as a significant register to ongoing debates on cosmopolitanism. The last chapter of this section paves the way for rethinking Istanbul, its alternative futures and Europe from the point of civilization, modernity and culture. The anthropologist Michael Herzfeld creatively concludes the book in the epilogue while he simultaneously furthers the discussion on culture, modernity, the past and the city while he *kaleidoscopically* weaves the further points of analysis that this volume can make sense in other geographies in the epilogue.

Orienting Istanbul could be read as a response by scholars from diverse backgrounds to the deep transmogrification that Istanbul has experienced in the last quarter century. The three major interconnected processes—neoliberalization, deindustrial-

ization and globalization, re-formed and re-shaped the city-spaces in both economic and spatial levels. This book takes the culture industries and the art scene as a departure point to decode what has happened in Istanbul. This constitutive preference about the architecture of the book is buttressed by a number of more social scientific approaches that provide a miscellaneous background for the debates about the role of the players of the arts and culture circles. One dimension that might be criticized about this architectural preference to talk about arts and culture is the relative silence (except Chapter 3) on Istanbulites' interpretations and reactions against this massive change. This book informs us about the new Istanbul and its urban economy that is based on culture, heritage, arts, and creative industries but our curiosity on how this novelty is read, participated, incorporated, resisted or denied by millions of Istanbulites continues unsatisfied.

Finally, I want to mention the urban tourism aspect that *Orienting Istanbul* is indeed deeply related with but on the surface it seems like a marginalized concern. Despite the fact that the book starts with recounting Istanbul's 19th position at the *New York Times*' ranking of "The 31 Places to Go in 2010" in the very first page (and this information is reiterated in the book) the phrases "tourism" and "Istanbul as a tourist destination" passes only a few times throughout the book. I tend to deem the development of the tourist city and the rapid increase in the power and effectiveness of culture industries and art scenes are both reciprocal and symbiotic processes. In this sense, Istanbul is not an industrial center any more, even at the national scale, it is not a financial center yet (maybe it will never be) and it is not possible to represent it as a "global city" through the multiscale networks, flows and mobilities it is meant to have. In this urban context, Istanbul rises (or, "is discovered" by the Westerners) simultaneously as a tourist city, as its historical counterpart Rome, and as a hip urban venue of arts and culture, maybe as Berlin or Venice. *Orienting Istanbul* opens a crucial door in our comprehension of the dynamics that govern the rapidly evolving city (which is in a "frenetic transformation" as Herzfeld puts it, p. 313) but it also highlights the obvious need for different studies and research agendas to further contribute our critical knowledge on Istanbul's potential as a tourist destination and its multiple meanings at a palette including cosmopolitanism, creativity, and flexible boundaries of the city, the nation and the world.

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