

BOOK REVIEWS

Esra Özyürek. *Nostalgia for the Modern: State Secularism and Everyday Politics in Turkey*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.

Özyürek's *Nostalgia for the Modern* is a meticulously researched, methodologically innovative and theoretically sophisticated work that will further invigorate the budding ethnographic literature on Turkey.¹ More generally, it will contribute to ethnographies of the nation in which the nation-state—rather than the smaller and more typical village or community—comprises the object of anthropological inquiry.

Taking her cue from R. Williams,² Özyürek introduces her study as an exploration of the “structure of feeling” of nostalgia shared by the Kemalist elite and citizens who yearn for the early years of the Turkish Republic. This yearning, Özyürek argues, is new in that it involves what she calls the “privatization of republican ideology and imagery” through, for example, the adornment of private interiors with republican symbols, the commodification and consumption of Atatürk insignia, or the interest in the life stories of first-generation republican citizens. Building on Svetlana Boym's analysis of nostalgia³ as integral to modernity (rather than as indicative of disillusionment with modernity), Özyürek inquires how recent Kemalist nostalgia articulates with the neo-liberal economy and the current political scene. She argues that Kemalist nostalgia and its personalization of politics is contingent on two simultaneous processes: On the one hand, it is contingent on the incorporation of the neo-liberal symbolism of privatization, market choice, and voluntarism into the etatism and nationalism of Kemalist ideology; on the other hand, it is dependent on the Kemalists' strategic deployment of such symbolism as a retort to the perceived threats posed by political Islam and the Kurdish movement.

Chapter 1 critically addresses the surge of interest in the private lives of first-generation republican citizens. Based on in-depth interviews with octogenarians who are paradoxically dubbed “children of the Republic,” Özyürek demonstrates how these staunch Kemalists take pains to

1 For two other recent and wonderfully innovative ethnographies in the field of political anthropology, see, Ayşe Gül Altınay, *The Myth of the Military Nation: Militarism, Gender and Education in Turkey* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), Yael Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

2 Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

3 Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

underscore their ardent support for the single-party rule. As Özyürek's perceptive narrative analysis reveals, they do so primarily by subsuming their life histories under the official textbook version of republican history. In an analytically smart and theoretically well-justified move, instead of trying to catch the contradictions or to unearth the *truly* authentic in these carefully crafted stories, Özyürek precisely chooses to engage with their framing for public consumption. The systematic self-censure of details considered private leads Özyürek to view nostalgia not as a reflection on the past, but rather as a strategy that serves the present. The very presentation of personal lives as the ultimate fulfillment of Kemalist ideals facilitates a defense of the republican regime against its critics who see it as authoritarian.

If the framing of the life story is one innovative research site where Özyürek locates Kemalist nostalgia, contemporary museum exhibits—the subject of chapter 2—constitute another. As part of the 75th anniversary celebrations of the Turkish Republic, public intellectuals and academics organized various exhibits hosted by NGOs and commercial institutions such as banks—an unprecedented delegation of representational authority beyond official state jurisdiction, as Özyürek notes. These exhibits sought to depict the early republican period along with contemporary modern lifestyles as its legacies. In harmony with the neo-liberal framework of freedom and voluntarism, the exhibit organizers downplayed the authoritarian aspects of the early republican period and emphasized instead the “willing, collectively shared and intimately internalized relationship of citizens to Turkish modernity.”⁴ There was, however, slippage between intention and reception: Based on evidence gathered from visitor books, Özyürek astutely observes that most spectators persisted on viewing the relationship between the state and citizen not in the neo-liberal terms of voluntarism, but in the authoritarian terms of paternalism and obligation.

Also inspired by the market symbolism of choice and will is the novel approach which informed the organization of the 75th anniversary celebrations. Chapter 4 elaborates how the organizers, once again NGO representatives and intellectuals rather than state officials, aimed at spontaneity and the expression of personal enthusiasm, in contrast to the usual structured official commemorations. Once again Özyürek adroitly situates this seeming substitution of free market ideals for those of state planning in historical perspective and reveals the echoes of the 1933 tenth anniversary celebrations in the 1998 celebrations. Noting that the idea of

4 Esra Özyürek, *Nostalgia for the Modern: State Secularism and Everyday Politics in Turkey* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 91.

voluntary citizen participation was politically expedient right after the suppression of a democratically elected Islamic government via military intervention, Özyürek states that the deployment of neo-liberal discourses by Kemalist intellectuals and officials “reconciles the memory of the single-party regime with the market, rather than preparing the grounds for the replacement of state ideology by the market.”⁵

The proliferation and commodification of Atatürk imagery—now printed on posters, mugs, T-shirts, and used in advertisements—is yet another way in which the authority of the Turkish state is masked under the guise of consumer choice. In chapter 3, Özyürek points to a shift away from monument-like and stern images of Atatürk that ordinarily command public space and towards miniaturized images that depict a more “humanized” Atatürk—such as the first publicly smiling statue of Atatürk, pictures that portray him lying on the grass, drinking, in the company of women; that is to say, pictures that citizen consumers “can incorporate into their private lives and engage with in a less hierarchical relationship.”⁶ Özyürek suggests that this commodified reclamation of Atatürk can be viewed both as a retort to the proliferation of Islamic symbols and practices *and* as the legitimization of the state in the neo-liberal era when privatizing a state icon verifies state support by volition rather than force. As Özyürek perceptively argues, however, while indexing free choice, these acts simultaneously facilitate the entry of ideological state symbols into the most intimate domains.

The final ethnographic chapter allocates space to the Islamists and their claim to *their* share of nostalgia for the foundational years. Islamists, in turn, point to the religious aspects of the Republic in the 1920s, thus alleging that the later suppression of religious practices is a deviation from the original principles. In analyzing the Kemalists and Islamists’ competing interpretations of the history of the Turkish Republic, Özyürek reiterates—and thereby nicely completes the circle that she set in motion in chapter 1—the approach to “memory as a presentist act that reconfigures contemporary, rather than past, relations and structures of power.”⁷

At the end of the day, as Özyürek underscores in her concluding chapter, more market symbolism does not mean less state authority. To the contrary, private citizens utilize the new market symbolism to defend and reinforce state ideology and, by personalizing it, create a new—and perhaps even reinforced—connection between state and citizen. One could ask if this is

5 Ibid., 150.

6 Ibid., 95.

7 Ibid., 154.

yet another Levi-Straussian instance of “plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose”? Not quite, for, according to Özyürek, the “old ideologies and symbolisms [are] finding themselves new homes in the personal, domestic, market-related and civic arenas—transforming them in the process.”⁸ Özyürek spots these transformations in new forms of personalized expressions of politics, in new connections forged with neo-liberalism, or in the idea of voluntary citizen participation. She takes the argument about transformations even further to conclude that the “new choice-based and affective engagement with Kemalist representations and ideology *defied* the unquestionable dominance of the founding ideology in Turkey” and that the “new circulation of the Turkish state symbolism as a part of market principles *marks the end* of corporatist and etatist Kemalism and revives it in a new form.”⁹ One wonders here whether Özyürek’s language is not too strong. For a political culture in which—as Özyürek herself acknowledges—Kemalism perseveres as the legitimating symbol for most movements from the center-left to the right, might we not need a vocabulary more subdued than that of defiance and endings? Perhaps a Gramscian framework that describes the shift from a transformative to an expansive hegemony might lead us to also inquire about the ways in which the neo-liberal versions of Kemalism (which Özyürek suggests to call nostalgic Kemalism or neo-Kemalism) merge with right-wing nationalism. Or, it might lead us to reconsider Özyürek’s usage of “secularist” as shorthand for Kemalist, a designation that risks the reification of Kemalists and Islamists as diametrically opposed groups and thereby overlooks their mutually constitutive, shared political culture.¹⁰ Finally, the preceding and more radical challenges to Kemalism from certain wings on the left, including those of non-nationalist Kurdish protesters, as counter-hegemonic forces need perhaps to be more explicitly situated *vis-à-vis* the more recent and milder challenges of neo-liberalism.

That said, *Nostalgia for the Modern* makes an excellent contribution to the recent critical scholarship on Kemalism. Özyürek offers fine-tuned and illuminating discussions of the emergent culture of neo-liberalism and its relation to Kemalism and manages to do so in a highly charged political field. It is obvious that she has masterfully navigated what must have been a thorny ethnographic field peopled by fervent interlocutors. She strikes an admirable balance between effacement and over-presence with regard to

8 Ibid., 180.

9 Ibid., 182, all italics mine.

10 Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State*; Taha Parla, *Türkiye’de Siyasal Kültürün Resmi Kaynakları: Atatürk’ün Nutuk’u* (Istanbul: İletişim, 1991).

her own voice and positionality and remains disinterested but extremely engaged throughout. Her prose is elegant, yet free of jargon, and the arguments are multi-layered and nuanced without compromising clarity. An extremely timely and welcome addition to political anthropology and the ethnography of Turkey, Özyürek's study also has much to offer to those interested in the relationship between nostalgia and modernity, the public and the private, and neo-liberalism and nationalism.

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Keyman, E. Fuat, and Ahmet İçduygu, eds. *Citizenship in a Global World: European Questions and Turkish Experiences*. London: Routledge, 2005.

This collection starts with the premise that Turkish modernity in general and its key component, the republican model of governance, in particular have been suffering from an ongoing crisis, as a result of its state-centric orientation that prioritizes national interest over individual liberties and “state sovereignty over individual autonomy.”¹ Keyman and İçduygu argue that both the source of this chronic crisis of governance and legitimacy in Turkish politics and its solution lie in the issue of citizenship. The authors state that the crisis of modernity in Turkey is simultaneously a crisis of the republican model of citizenship; therefore, a democratic reconstruction of modernity is possible only through the creation of a constitutional, multi-cultural, democratic regime of citizenship.

Even though this collection brings together scholars of Turkish studies, the main approach developed in the introduction goes far beyond the case of Turkey and poses the question of citizenship in rather global terms, developing a critical understanding of citizenship and its relation to democracy in a much broader frame. By doing so, it certainly deserves the title *Citizenship in a Global World*. According to the authors, citizenship involves not only a set of legal measures that regulate the relationship between the state and the individual, but also the relationship between the individual and his/her group identities, as well as the complex web of relationships among such groups and between them and the state. Defining citizenship in such broad terms not only allows for its analysis as an

1 E. Fuat Keyman and Ahmet İçduygu, eds., *Citizenship in a Global World: European Questions and Turkish Experiences* (London: Routledge, 2005), 6.