

# Introduction

In the last twenty years, Turkey has witnessed significant social, cultural, and political change. This transformation has been visible in all walks of life and sectors of society, from political ideologies to the institutional set up of the state. As the country is changing, so is the academic literature, which has been expanding in parallel to Turkey's growing economy and differentiating society. In this collection, 12 authors seek to elucidate the dynamics of this transformation from a distinctively interdisciplinary perspective with a focus on innovative conceptual approaches, and with the aim to introduce new methodologies to the study of modern Turkey.

The volume deals with the most important fault lines of Turkey's complex society. The contributors focus on issues of citizenship, religion, politics, gender, minority rights, the dynamics of transnational movements, and the growing importance of the Turkish diaspora. Inspired by the debates on deliberative democracy and by critical theory, the authors aim to revisit existing concepts, models, and methodologies to overcome binary explanations of protest and contestation against the state. The emphasis here is on the interactive nature of contestation in heterogeneous multi-organizational fields and multi-national settings. Established dichotomies of East and West, modernity and tradition, and secularism and Islam are put to the test.

This collection has three aims. The first is to re-examine ethno-cultural and ethno-religious relations in Turkey with a critical perspective on nation building. Some authors suggest that Turkey has now entered a phase of coming to terms with its troubled past and that this process provides some hope for a deepening of the country's democratic culture. The second aim is to shed light on social, political, and cultural movements, and to investigate the way these groups challenge constructed notions of the public, by the Turkish state. We need only to remember the Gezi protests of May–June, 2013 to see the extent to which some citizens of the

Turkish Republic wish to play a greater role in shaping this public space. Developments in the field of Kurdish and Alevi rights, the changing role of religion in the public, and the increasingly visible presence of LGBT activists are all manifestations signifying how the ideology of the state and the ruling party is being challenged. Third, the authors emphasize that the debates on identity, citizenship, national belonging, ethnicity, religion, and culture are no longer territorialized, but have taken on transnational and trans-local qualities.

The essays of the volume's first section deal with efforts of *Appropriating the Past*. They focus on distinct practices that actors employ in order to challenge established official narratives.

**Eray Çaylı** discusses the role of architectural memorialization and particularly the contested memory politics of the ›Sivas Massacre‹. Sites of massacres can be pacified and controlled by techniques of ›museumification‹, and this is precisely what state agencies have been doing with the museum they established in the former Madımak Hotel. The outcome of such state action is that rather than commemorating the victims, such museums become symbolic markers for the government's rather shallow democratization discourse. Çaylı proposes the notion of a ›witness site‹, where past events are not only remembered, but where evidence is gathered and testimonies are narrated.

**Caroline Tee** explores the liminal space between conflict and incorporation in her study on Alevi engagement with hegemonic majority discourses. Exploring different positions within the contemporary Alevi Movement, her case study presents an Alevi group from Erzincan, which differs from other Alevi groups in that they reveal their openness to negotiation with authorities.

**Belin Benezra's** institutional history of family planning in Turkey traces the roots of this policy back to the founding years of the Turkish Republic. She shows how family policies have always been in the service of the state's larger demographic and political needs. This trend, she remarks, is also reflected in the most recent neo-liberal health reforms. With the aim to ensure the sustainability of state pensions, family planning has now been almost dropped in the discourse employed by leading AKP cadres.

The second section, *Challenging Authority*, explores the fields of public contestation and negotiation of identity. The authors reconstruct the ways whereby authority is challenged in the public sphere and map emerging repertoires of social action.

**Laura Tocco** criticizes the concepts of civil society, which have dominated the Turkish debate thus far, and proposes a perspective influenced by the work of Marx and Gramsci, which have also been very widely used in the analysis of politics and society in Turkey. Tocco argues that the Turkish Republic was built as a typical case of class hegemony. Her analysis of articles from the feminist weekly

*Kadın Gazetesi* reveals Kemalist undertones in the debate over women's rights, asserting the hegemonic state even in what is commonly assumed to be a movement critical of state intervention.

**Doğu Durgun** and **Elif Kalaycıoğlu** provide a comparative analysis of Muslim women's organizations on the one side and LGBT groups on the other, looking into shared claims for citizenship and the possibility for alliance building. Their study suggests that actors can indeed transcend binaries such as republican/liberal, equality/difference, and public/private, if the conditions of a shared interest are present.

**İpek Gencel Sezgin** posits that identities are in no way essential, but contingent and unpredictable. This is also true, she argues, for political Islam and other political ideologies. Sezgin explores the recruitment patterns of the National Outlook Movement and of right-wing networks in Kayseri between 1960 and 1980, and examines their practices and identity frames. She detects a very large overlap between the two networks. Reconstructing the movement's identity as the combined product of conscious efforts and unintentional processes, she draws attention to the interplay of the national and local levels in the political field.

**Feyda Sayan-Cengiz** shows how lower middle class working women with headscarves struggle with hegemonic narratives about them, and how they seek to subvert those narratives by differentiating themselves from what they call the ›really conservative‹. This chapter strongly suggests that contrasting the headscarf as a symbol of Islamic identity against the once hegemonic ideal of secular women has become obsolete both in theoretical and public debates.

**Anne Schluter** finds a comparable trend in the language choices of Kurdish workers in Istanbul. Her findings illustrate how Kurds use both Turkish and Kurdish to achieve differentiated sociolinguistic goals and to cater to different audiences. Her paper provides linguistic evidence that the two languages are more likely to be representative of compatible rather than competing identities.

The final section on *Transnational Dynamics* extends beyond the territory of the Turkish nation-state. The contributions in this section illustrate how the global presence of citizens of the Turkish Republic as well as communication and transport technologies enable them to both reproduce and challenge the territorially-defined identities across national borders.

**Özlem Altan Olcay** and **Evren Balta Paker** explore a recent practice among Turkish elites. In order to acquire a second citizenship for their children, some families opt to give birth in the United States. The authors conceptualize the case as ›market embedded transnationalism‹ in which citizenship becomes commodified, as it can be obtained through market mechanisms. In this vein, it can be inferred that the meanings of transnational citizenship are shaped by commodification and market performance, hence contributing to existing inequalities in novel ways.

**Çiğdem Bozdağ** pays attention to the important role of digital mass media for migrant communities as they help to maintain networks with their countries of origin. Attempting to fill the gap of research in this field, she provides examples from two cases, which illustrate how digital media intensifies transnational practices at the micro level and changes the character of migrants' encounters with Turkey in their everyday lives.

Exploring the example of Bulgarian Turks, **Nevin Şahin-Malkoç** studies the adaptation strategies of immigrants in Göçmen Konutları (Migrants' Houses). Göçmen Konutları is a residential area in Istanbul initially built for Bulgarian Turkish refugees, who arrived in Istanbul in the late 1980s. This community is now bordering on another residential area, Başakşehir, which is popular among conservative Muslims. Şahin-Malkoç illustrates how the memories from Bulgaria are revived, how the transnational immigrant identity is reproduced, and how physical and social isolation fosters the contestation of »homeland« and »dreamland«.

The volume finishes with **Doğuş Şimşek's** discussion of young Turks and Kurds in London. She investigates how relations with the country of origin, the city of residence, and local neighbourhood are constructed through everyday life experiences. In particular, she discusses how the engagement of Turkish and Kurdish youth, with these three spatial levels, influences the definition of their sense of self and belongingness to the country of origin and the country of residence.

The complexity of Turkish society, culture, and politics, and its on-going transformation call for interdisciplinary perspectives. This volume comprises a variety of innovative theoretical and methodological approaches to Turkish Studies. The findings of the twelve authors of this book contribute significantly to providing an enhanced understanding of contemporary Turkey. Furthermore, this book generates new research questions and stimulates further in-depth analysis.

Kristina Kamp, Berlin Humboldt University

Ayhan Kaya, Istanbul Bilgi University

E. Fuat Keyman, Istanbul Policy Center at Sabancı University

Özge Onursal Beşgül, Istanbul Bilgi University



<http://www.springer.com/978-3-658-04915-7>

Contemporary Turkey at a Glance  
Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Local and Translocal  
Dynamics

Kamp, K.; Kaya, A.; Keyman, E.F.; Onursal Besgul, O.  
(Eds.)

2014, VI, 202 p. 16 illus., 1 illus. in color., Softcover  
ISBN: 978-3-658-04915-7