

Introduction

Investigating the intricate relationship between culture and politics can provide interesting insights and ideas in the area of the Turkish Studies. Starting from this general assumption, the Consortium for European Symposia on Turkey (CEST) dedicated its 5th annual symposium to “the Concept of Culture and its Politicization in Turkey”, held in Vienna in November 2019. The premise was that culture should be understood as a highly contested resource, yet, something which is continuously in process and hence not fixed. In fact, culture serves as the field for affirming hegemonic discourse but also as a space to create and perform resistance strategies. For that, culture is not considered as an exclusive term which only applies to high culture, but also to all sorts of mundane and everyday practices, performances and expressions.

In the long path that led to the construction of the Turkish national state, thus going back decades before the foundation of the republic, culture has been recognized and crossed as a fundamental and useful space for forming – and performing – national identity, and consequently used as a tool for implementing and legitimizing a political project. At the same time, culture and cultural production, elaborated as a political instrument, cannot be successfully moulded in a uniform and homogeneous way. Its intrinsic momentum of innovation and creativity has always created, even in Turkey, open spaces for criticism and negotiation, or even just offered the possibility for visibility and escape.

Thus, in a context of nationalism and constant politicization, it is also possible to recognize different discourses on culture and numerous practices of articulating, performing and producing culture. Literature, music, cinema, magazines, theatre, cultural movements have been continuously displaying a plurality of cultural identities / resources – be it in line with or against the cultural policy of the State. Despite policies of censorship and repression, or even only attempts from above to control and uniform, the space of cultural production has represented and represents for minorities – be it ethnic, religious, political or LGBTQ- groups – a way of forcing the constraints of the nationalist ideology for shaping and formulating their own identity in the public space.

Studying the connection between politics and culture, the mechanisms and the social consequences of the politicization of culture as well the culturalization of politics, broadens the horizon of Turkish Studies and can potentially open to a wide spectrum of analysis, also combining multiple approaches and disciplines, aiming at overcoming persistent dominant discourses and categories.

Here we present three different contributions [previously presented at the CEST Symposium in 2019]. The first concerns the politics of cultural heritage in the late Ottoman Empire, and specifically the process of defining cultural heritage starting from the valorisation of the archaeological remains found in the Ottoman Empire. Sebastian Willert, after giving an overview of the political relations between the German Empire and the Ottoman Empire, examines the German’s acquisition policy of ancient objects from the Ottoman territory. Willert highlights how the Ottoman authorities’ responses differed depending on whether they belonged to the political or cultural sphere, and

how German representatives tried to benefit from this discrepancy. He argues that Germany's (Prussia's) will to appropriate ancient objects correlated with the valorisation of antiquities, which for figures such as Osman Hamdi or Halil Edhem became symbols of identity.

The second and third contributions explore popular culture, namely youth culture during the second half of the 20th century: the satirical press and the punk scene. Valentina Marcella's article focuses on the satirical weekly *Girgir* and its evolution from its early days up to the end of the military regime of 1980 to 1983. Marcella underlines the way the magazine became increasingly political in the growing politicization of society in the 1970s and argues how in the early 80s, in spite of restrictions imposed by the military rule, the magazine has not ceased to be critical on a political level. The author focuses in particular on the cartoons – besides the professional ones *Girgir* published also amateur and semi-amateur examples – which even though they revolved mainly around themes of everyday life were political. She concludes that *Girgir* was “*politically critical, on the side of civil society and of the oppressed.*”

The third contribution likewise concentrates in particular on the period following the military coup of 1980. Analysing the emergence of punk in Turkey Carlotta de Sanctis points out how, in this period, despite a tightly controlled cultural climate, new channels of underground production emerged. Indeed, considering punk not only as a musical genre but also as an underground culture with wider socio-political trends and implications, De Sanctis addresses youth sub-cultures, and the changing forms of expression of dissent, also in generational terms, in a context where not only the possibilities of contestation, including musical ones, were severely limited but also the politicization of the younger generations seemed to have entered a crisis. Punk, she argues, “*introduced important and innovative debates that helped pave the way for new approaches and interpretations in Turkey in terms of the relationship between music and the political.*”

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