

Introductory Note

This volume emerged from a conference entitled “Sociabilities in the Turkic speaking world” held 25-27 February 2005 at Bilgi University in Istanbul. The symposium was organized jointly by Claus Schöning (then Orient-Institute Istanbul) and Arus Yumul (Bilgi University). The original conference title was chosen with a view on the basic importance of collocated group interaction for the reproduction of society. However, as the proceedings submitted to this volume mainly deal with groups, ideologies and discourses in Turkey, including some glimpses on other parts of the Turkic speaking world, we decided to amend the title of this volume accordingly.

Over the last twenty years Turkey and the Turkic speaking world have undergone large social, political and economic changes. These changes have influenced and created new social groups, ideologies and discourses. This volume aims at reflecting and analyzing some of these changes and developments.

The first contribution addresses an aspect pertaining to the political sphere of discourse in the Republic of Turkey. It appears that the nationalist discourse in Turkey during the last few years has taken an increasingly negative stance towards the West in general and the US in particular. Drawing on several recent publications as well as the popular film “Valley of the Wolves” the article by Christoph Herzog (Orient-Institute Istanbul) tries to demonstrate that “the clash of civilizations” as a topic in Turkish discourse is not so much connected to any specific political ideology but rather forms an element of the Turkish nationalist discourse that seems to reach a broad consensus.

Armenians in today's Turkey are the subject of the following two articles by Ayşe Komsuoğlu (University of Istanbul) and H. Birsen Örs (University of Istanbul), which are based on quantitative as well as qualitative data from common fieldwork in Istanbul. Komsuoğlu analyzes the political profile of the Armenians by exploring their level of interest in politics, their voting behavior and the ability of the Armenian community to participate in collective political action.

In a similar vein, the article by Örs deals with the attitude of Armenians towards the Turkish army. The two articles, thus, offer rare insights into a group that, while frequently representing the “Other” in much of the public discourse of Turkey, has - perhaps not surprisingly - remained largely ignored and unknown.

New forms of Islamic thinking and acting are discussed by Uğur Kömeçoğlu (Bilgi University) and Barbara Pusch (Orient-Institute Istanbul). Uğur Kömeçoğlu analyzes the concordance between the asceticism and activism of the followers of Fethullah Gülen community, a huge and well-established Nurcu movement in Turkey. In this context he focuses on the correlation between self-denial and religiosity. Secondly he analyzes the societal level of the community according to the works of the movement's spiritual leader Fethullah Gülen and

underlines his understanding of religion as an expression of the moral expansions of the religious collectivity towards wider publics.

Barbara Pusch, however, points to another aspect within the Islamic discourse in Turkey. In her analysis of a love manual by Halit Erdoğan, she shows the wide-ranging overlap of moderate Islam/Islamism on the one hand and widespread conservative values and standards on the other. Accordingly she argues that the moderate understanding of Islam is not a break but a continuity of Sunni-conservative thought in Turkey.

The women's studies by İnci Özkan Kerestecioğlu (University of Istanbul) and Sevgi Uçan Çubukçu (University of Istanbul) contribute to this volume from the gender perspective. İnci Özkan Kerestecioğlu analyzes family discourse throughout the Ottoman-Turkish modernization process. By comparing the family as a social unit to various social structures and practices, she deconstructs the unquestioned realm of modernity from a gendered perspective in the Turkish discourse.

The changing gender discourse in popular culture since 1990 is the subject of Sevgi Uçan Çubukcu's contribution. In her analysis of television series she points to heterosexist inequalities and masculine discourse. She argues that the place that gender roles occupy in Turkish television series both construct and deconstruct the hierarchical structure of gender roles in the traditional context.

The articles by Arienne Dwyer, Hanne Straube and Feza Tansuğ deal with groups, ideologies and discourses in the broader Turkic speaking world.

In her article on bridal laments in the Turkic world Arienne Dwyer (University of Kansas), besides presenting a linguistic analysis of one case study, argues that these laments as rituals and stylized expressions of grief are on the losing side of the cultural dynamics of modernity. Having been condemned as "backward" by the socialist governments of both the PRC and the former Soviet Union, Eurasian laments, in contrast to some other forms of cultural heritage, seem unsuitable for being rediscovered, reinvented and appropriated for ethnonationalist and other ideologies after the end of dogmatic socialism.

Feza Tansuğ's (Yeditepe University, Istanbul) article deals with social change, identity and music-making in the Uygur diaspora in Central Asia. After a short overview on Uygur migration to the former USSR, he focuses on the music-making of these migrants by analyzing the overlapping social and cultural patterns in the home and host country. In this context he points to music-making as having an important impact on the construction of their cultural identity.

In contrast, the article by Hanne Straube (Frankfurt am Main) focuses on a different subject in a different geographical area of Central Asia: In her article she lists the pros and cons of the Manas-epic in Kyrgyzstan. After an introductory chapter on Manas and the national ideology in Kyrgyzstan, she portrays different interpretations of this epic by citing various parts of personal interviews she conducted during her field study in Kyrgyzstan.

As anyone who has edited a book knows very well, there are always many more people than the authors and editors who contribute to a publication. With this idea in mind, we want to offer our thanks to Arus Yumul and Claus Schönig for their initial idea and organization of the workshop, the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung for the financial support of the workshop and Vanessa Karam for her English language proofreading.

Christoph Herzog & Barbara Pusch
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