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Mapping Emotional Currents in Modern Turkey: A Critical Interdisciplinary Review

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Introduction

Anthropology and Sociology of Emotions: Theoretical and Ethnographic Perspectives from Turkey and Beyond, edited by Ramazan Aras, constitutes a formidable intervention into the fabric of Turkish social life by rearticulating the role of emotions as dynamic forces that are simultaneously socio-political, historical, and cultural. Rather than relegating emotions to the realm of individual or psychological phenomena, the volume rigorously foregrounds their collective and discursive dimensions and illustrates how affect both informs and is reconfigured by broader religious, historical, and political milieus. In challenging the conventional “top-down” narratives that have long dominated accounts of Turkish modernity, the volume is critical in exposing the fact that these narratives tend to obscure the affective underpinnings of secular authoritarian legacies, Islamist mobilizations, and other transformative processes. This book interweaves historical analysis, personal testimony, and theoretical reflection to argue that any comprehensive understanding of modern Turkey must privilege emotions as central analytical categories. Furthermore, the book interrogates and transcends dominant Eurocentric frameworks and advocates for a multidisciplinary approach that synthesizes insights from anthropology, philosophy,

sociology, theology, history, and religious studies. The volume mobilizes concepts such as “*Ummahhood*,” “*hüzün*,” and religiously inflected emotional communities, and in so doing it not only expands traditional Western theoretical frames but also illuminates the profound cultural sensitivities and the enduring influence of Islamic intellectual traditions on the affective landscape.

Positioned as an indispensable resource, this volume speaks to a diverse readership that spans Turkish studies, Middle Eastern and Islamic studies, social movement research, migration studies, and religious anthropology. It offers extensive and empirically grounded case studies that reveal the transformative role of emotions in shaping societal dynamics, and it thereby appeals equally to theorists of emotion and cultural sociologists engaged in comparative inquiry. Chapters in this volume present broad theoretical orientations that include phenomenology, postcolonial critique, and incisive analyses of secularism and the history of emotions. These approaches render the volume equally valuable to policy makers, non-governmental organizations, and international organizations concerned with issues such as refugee integration, diaspora engagement, and the regulation of cross-border marriages. Detailed explorations, which range

from enforced unveiling during the single-party regime to the evocative resonances of leftist protest songs and Islamist mobilizations, serve not only to enrich academic discourse but also to contribute critically to ongoing debates about the intersections of historical change, cultural transformation, and affective life. In this manner, the book emerges both as a scholarly intervention in the study of Turkish social life and as a timely contribution to international discussions regarding the profound role of emotions in the construction of political and social realities.

Chapter Organisation and Themes

The book is meticulously structured into four distinct parts, and each contribute uniquely to a comprehensive exploration of the role of emotions in Turkey. The standalone *Introduction* by Ramazan Aras sets the programmatic tone by challenging conventional Western-centric and structuralist approaches and by advocating for a multidisciplinary perspective that embraces cultural specificity as well as historical context. This introductory section frames the entire volume by outlining its expansive chronological range from the early Republican era (1923–1950) to contemporary phenomena (2000s–2020s) and by emphasizing the necessity of integrating theoretical insights with localized case studies.

In Part I, titled *Theoretical Reflections on Emotions* (Chapters 1–3), the volume establishes its intellectual foundation. In Chapter 1, Gökalp revisits the philosophy of emotion by bridging ancient Greek, Islamic, and modern Western thought in order to highlight the evolving balance between reason and passion. Hirschkind in Chapter 2 examines the intersection of theology and anthropology and illustrates how religious traditions contribute to our understanding of embodied vulnerability and interdependence. In Chapter 3, Yıldırım focuses on shame as a social emotion and maps the ways in which modernization, secularism, and global cultural shifts continuously reshape its norms. These chapters, when considered together, form a robust theoretical scaffolding that both informs and enriches the subsequent empirical investigations.

Part II, entitled *Emotional Turn in the History of Modern Turkey* (Chapters 4–6), applies this theoretical framework to historical processes. In Chapter 4, Aras details the deployment of state-driven hate during the early Republic and probes the ideological motivations behind targeting Muslim bodies while assessing its lasting impact on collective memory. Demirden in

Chapter 5 captures the pervasive fear experienced by Qur'ān memorizers under Kemalist repression, and Dursun in Chapter 6 examines cinematic portrayals of fear, anxiety, and class conflict from 1965 to 1980. This section demonstrates that emotions are not mere byproducts of historical processes but rather active agents in shaping governance, social exclusion, and cultural expression.

Part III, titled *Social Movements, Identity, and City* (Chapters 7–9), shifts the focus to contemporary emotional dynamics. In Chapter 7, Vömel introduces the concept of "Islamist sentimentalism" and reveals how expressions such as tears, nostalgia, and solidarity serve to mobilize political activism. Houston in Chapter 8 explores leftist emotional communities through revolutionary songs that forge enduring bonds, and Ringmar in Chapter 9 offers a phenomenological discussion on urban moods as exemplified by Istanbul's distinctive "hüzün." Together these chapters underscore the ways in which emotional bonds shape political movements as well as urban identities.

Finally, Part IV, under the title *Politics of Migration and Marriage* (Chapters 10–12), extends the inquiry into transnational contexts. In Chapter 10, Kalmoy demonstrates how Turkey's pro-Ummah rhetoric mobilizes African Muslim diasporas in search of an "Islamic haven." Ekinci in Chapter 11 examines the construction and circulation of anti-immigrant emotions such as fear, hate, and mistrust in a border city, and Karabatak in Chapter 12 highlights how trust is negotiated within Indonesian–Turkish marriages. This final section makes clear that global flows in both migration and marriage are deeply embedded in emotional frameworks that influence individual decisions as well as collective identities.

The Introduction authored by Aras is pivotal in establishing the book's ambitions. It not only provides a rationale for the study of emotions in Turkey but also offers a critique of prevailing Western frameworks by advocating a pluralistic approach informed by Islamic intellectual traditions. The Introduction systematically outlines the contributions of each part of the volume and unifies the subsequent analyses under a common agenda. This agenda invites readers to reconceptualize emotions as central to the shaping of modern Turkish identity, politics, and culture. Although the volume does not contain a single unified concluding chapter, the final chapters of each part serve as partial conclusions that reiterate the introductory themes. These last 3 chapters, to be considered as concluding remarks of the book, reinforce the interplay of identity, religion, and politics and underscore the volume's

central claim that emotions are indispensable for a truly more informed, in-dept understanding of Turkish society.

A critical strength of the volume lies in its concerted effort to fill longstanding gaps in the study of Turkish emotional life. The book interweaves historical analysis, personal testimonies, and theoretical reflection in order to challenge the traditional "top-down" accounts of Turkish modernity and to contribute to debates concerning the tension between Kemalist secularism and Islamic expressions of identity. At the same time, a critic may assert that the volume exhibits some methodological inconsistencies. Although the chapters employ diverse approaches, for example oral histories in Chapters 4 and 5, textual and film analyses in Chapters 6 and 8, and participant observation in Chapters 10 through 12, there is a limited amount of explicit cross-referencing or methodological bridging among these studies. Furthermore, while the qualitative richness of the volume is commendable, future work could benefit from incorporating quantitative or survey-based methods in order to provide a broader national perspective on emotional attitudes in Turkey.

Comparative Analysis and Scholarly Contribution

The book's diverse sections are united by several interlocking thematic threads that both illuminate the construction and mobilization of emotions in Turkey and reveal the complex interplay between historical and contemporary dynamics. The foundational insights established in Part I, in which Gökalp, Hirschkind, and Yıldırım construct a robust theoretical scaffolding, provide essential tools for comprehending the empirical cases detailed in the subsequent parts. For example, a persistent tension between secular and Islamic emotional worlds becomes apparent. Further, the exploration in Part II of state-driven hate and communal fear under Kemalist policies is set in contrast with the depiction of what is termed "Islamist sentimentalism" in Part III and with the demonstration of transnational solidarity among diasporic communities in Part IV. This dialectical framework, in which secular impositions and religious emotional mobilizations are continually negotiated, serves to bridge historical contexts with modern phenomena in a compelling manner. In addition to this, the volume offers an in-dept or intricate comparison of urban, rural, and global dimensions of emotional life. Historical narratives presented in Part II, such as those detailing forced unveiling in local communities, establish a contextual backdrop against

which the urban melancholy of Istanbul's *hüzün*, as examined in Part III, and the transnational dynamics of migration and marriage, as analysed in Part IV, can be fully appreciated. The methodological diversity across the volume, which ranges from oral testimonies and archival research to analyses of cultural artifacts and ethnographic fieldwork, reinforces the central claim that qualitative, interpretive methods are indispensable for unraveling the complex and layered nature of emotions. Taken together, these interwoven approaches emphasize that emotions are structured phenomena that are deeply implicated in power relations, identity formation, and cultural transformation.

By bridging emotional theory with Turkish studies, the book makes a substantial scholarly contribution that reaches far beyond national boundaries. It systematically integrates insights from Western emotion theorists, drawing on the works of Ahmed, Asad, Simmel, and Hochschild, with rich perspectives from Islamic intellectual traditions, including those advanced by Ibn Hazm, Ibn Khaldūn, and in Sufi thought. This hybrid theoretical framework challenges established paradigms and offers a model that resonates within comparative contexts across other postcolonial and Muslim-majority societies. The volume's interdisciplinary approach, which merges anthropology, sociology, history, philosophy, religious studies, and international relations, ensures that emotions are examined as complex and layered phenomena that shape both historical processes and contemporary social dynamics.

In reinterpreting modern Turkish history through the lenses of fear, hate, and collective sentiment, the authors of the chapters in this volume cast emotional processes as active historical agents rather than as incidental by-products. This perspective is particularly evident in its treatment of key historical junctures, which range from the single-party era to the resurgence of Islamist activism in the 1980s and extend into contemporary trends in migration and marriage. Moreover, the volume offers timely socio-political insights by documenting how affective dynamics drive modern identity politics and global flows, as demonstrated by the mobilization of African Muslim diasporas and the intricate dynamics that characterize transnational marriages. With these, by synthesizing diverse theoretical frameworks with rich empirical evidence, the book not only advances our understanding of Turkey's past and present but also establishes a new standard for future research on the emotional underpinnings of social conflict and solidarity.

Conclusion and Future Directions

As I may re-emphasise, one of the volume's primary strengths lies in its interdisciplinary and holistic scope. By drawing on a diverse array of disciplines, including philosophy, theology, anthropology, sociology, history, film studies, and migration research, the book produces a richly textured and multi-layered account of emotions in Turkey. This broad academic canvas not only captures the intricate interplay among social structures, political discourses, and personal experiences but also reconceptualizes the study of emotions from a narrowly defined psychological inquiry into a vibrant exploration of affective life. The balanced combination of robust theoretical frameworks, which invoke influential voices such as Ahmed, Asad, Simmel, and Rosenwein, with detailed empirical case studies drawn from oral histories, ethnographic interviews, and textual, film, and autoethnographic analyses, convincingly demonstrates that emotions are deeply embedded in historical processes and socio-political dynamics. In addition, the volume is considerably strengthened by its rich primary data and its focus on local histories, capturing the voices of Qur'ān memorizers, diaspora families, married couples, and leftist activists. Its engagement with contemporary issues, such as anti-immigrant sentiment, the relocation of African Muslim diasporas, and the complexities of cross-continental marriages, further amplifies its relevance. The work speaks not only to a national audience but also to international scholars, and its deliberate effort to decenter Western-centric paradigms by foregrounding Islamic intellectual traditions together with postcolonial critiques adds a transformative dimension. This transformative dimension opens new pathways for understanding affect on a global scale.

Despite its many strengths, the volume exhibits several limitations that warrant further attention. One notable shortcoming is the absence of a unified concluding chapter. Although Ramazan Aras's introductory chapter sets a comprehensive and programmatic tone, the addition of a dedicated epilogue that synthesizes the diverse empirical findings and theoretical insights would have enhanced overall coherence and more clearly underscored the cross-pollination among the chapters. Moreover, while the historical analyses are robust, the focus remains selective. The work extensively covers the early Republican and mid-twentieth-century periods while devoting later sections to the decades of the 1980s through the 2000s and 2020s. As a consequence, certain periods, such as the 1970s or the post-2010 era, receive relatively lighter treatment

or are examined only through isolated case studies. In addition, although the volume provides rich detail on Sunni Muslim contexts, including the study of Islamist movements, Qur'ān memorizers, and diaspora networks, it offers limited exploration of other religious communities, for instance those representing Alevi or Christian emotional landscapes. The treatment of gender and class also appears underdeveloped. While some chapters address women's experiences, as in the discussions of enforced unveiling in Chapter 4 or headscarf conflicts in Chapter 7, a systematic feminist or intersectional analysis remains largely absent. Furthermore, although the qualitative depth of the work is a clear strength, the absence of quantitative or large-scale survey data leaves the findings without a broader national perspective that might either corroborate or challenge the localized insights.

Building on these observations, several avenues for future research emerge that could further advance the field. Scholars are encouraged to adopt an extended comparative framework that examines emotional processes in Turkey alongside those in other postcolonial or Muslim-majority societies, such as Egypt, Tunisia, or Malaysia, in order to illuminate shared patterns and unique variations in the mobilization of emotions by secularist reforms, Islamist movements, and diaspora dynamics. A deeper exploration of gender and class dimensions is also warranted. Future studies should focus more explicitly on women's emotional experiences across different religious and ethnic backgrounds. For instance, research could investigate how female piety movements cultivate specific sentiments of devotion or how secular feminist groups articulate emotional politics. At the same time, a nuanced analysis of class-based emotional discourses would serve to elucidate the impact of economic disparities on affective life. In addition, integrating quantitative methods with ethnographic approaches through mixed-method research designs would provide a more robust and generalizable perspective on emotional trends. Such an approach might combine surveys addressing issues such as the fear of immigrants or trust in religious institutions with in-depth interviews. Further, tracing longer historical continuities from the late Ottoman Empire through the Republican era and into the global age could reveal deeper patterns in state-driven emotional discourses. Finally, future research should also investigate the role of digital and global platforms in shaping new forms of emotional expression, for example through the analysis of online hate speech and communal empathy.

As my final remark, *Anthropology and Sociology of Emotions: Theoretical and Ethnographic Perspectives from Turkey and Beyond* persuasively demonstrates that understanding Turkey's intricate social and political landscape necessitates a multipronged in-dept exploration of how emotions, ranging from fear, shame, and hate to solidarity and trust, are cultivated, performed, contested, and transformed over time. Through its methodological pluralism and innovative synthesis of theoretical and empirical approaches, the volume establishes that emotional processes are not merely incidental; they are integral to the formation and reformation of power, identity, and belonging. While certain areas, such as the need for a unified conclusion, broader historical coverage, deeper gender and class analyses, and the incorporation of quantitative data, offer opportunities for further refinement, these limitations do little to detract from the work's landmark contribution. Its interdisciplinary approach and transnational scope not only advance our understanding of Turkey's past and present but also pave the way for future research into the dynamic emotional currents that continue to shape social realities.

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