

Introduction

Semiconscious States: The Political and the Psychic in Urban Public Life

Entering the City

Imagine a public square in the center of a metropolis crowded with hundreds of policemen, in identical uniforms, chanting slogans to demand more “rights” from “the state” to use their authority over “the people.” Imagine this taking place in Taksim Square, Istanbul, a site often selected for public demonstrations in critique of the state. Taksim Square—emblematic site in urban public consciousness for the enactment, production, and regeneration of the political—was built around the memorial monument for Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the secular/modernist founder of modern Turkey. Imagine a group of mothers and a father throwing themselves in front of the rushing cars in Taksim Square traffic, or another group sitting on the main street and waving their banners at hurried drivers blowing their horns. Picture the banners reading “Our children are dying on hunger strikes in prison.” Envision, then, pedestrians passing by, cursing and spitting at the demonstrating parents. Imagine hundreds of people gathering to watch what is happening, and doing nothing: a public voyeurism. Visualize a young man emerging from the crowd, his face red and his fists clenched, in an attempt to attack the parents demonstrating for their children. Imagine, then, the police approaching to force the parents out of the traffic and to threaten them with arrest. Picture, too, journalists running about, cameras clicking, their flashes encircling the incidents. Figure the stories produced by street dwellers and their rumor, as well as the TV news coverage of the latest events in the city center. Think about millions of people watching TV, reproducing and magnifying the political as framed by the journalists.

The public square, so imagined by social theorists as symbol par excellence for the public sphere or for civil society, is a site, here, for the production of the political. If it pretends to be a domain for rationalized communication and disagreement (Habermas 1989) or if it is idealized and represented as such in public discourses, the public square is interrupted with multiple interventions by representatives of the state. But who, what, and where is “the state” in the incidents just described? Here the police claim to be more “stately” than the state and demonstrate against it. There

is a pedestrian, an ordinary young man from “the public,” emerging to attack the parents of the hunger strikers thereby assuming a representation of the state through his action and persona. The state appears in many guises and constantly transfigures itself. If now it stands as a monument and symbol of the Republic in the garb of the statue of Atatürk erected in the middle of the public square; next it appears as a flash in the journalist’s camera. The state is represented in the police officers’ words of threat; it is there, as well, in the gazes of idling pedestrians. The state circulates in the political imaginations of consumers of news, sitting in their homes and watching TV. Events in public life are reflected and magnified within a culture of news, alarm, and sensation. Indeed, in this exemplary and emblematic public square, there is no space that is not arrested with one or another face of the state.

Faces of the State is a study of the production of the political in the public life of Turkey in the 1990s. Public life in Istanbul, with its complexity and absence of boundaries, is the main site for this ethnography. I construe “public life” as a site for the generation of the political, against the grain of such analytical categories like “the public sphere,” “public culture,” “civil society,” and “the state,” all frameworks that, in different ways, assume a distinction between domains of “power” and “resistance.”¹ I would like to employ the notion of public life to lead the reader into a precarious political arena where it is the public (ambiguously referring to both the people and the state) that produces and recasts the political. When configured as such, the notion of the public in public life enables us to analyze people and the state, not as an opposition, but as the same domain.

Most recent anthropological studies of the political have followed the strategy of picking a social institution and studying its production of public discourse. We therefore have ethnographies of education, law, bureaucracy, and medicine, imagined out of fieldwork in characteristic institutional sites: schools, courts, public offices, clinics. As important as such anthropological work has been, I argue that its analytical frames of the political are precisely that—“frames.” There is an assumption, in such strategies for research, that the political can be “sited” in its characteristic contexts, that the political appears in the garb of institutions and their discourses. I do not disagree with this proposition, but I would like to suggest that it is limited.

The work of Michel Foucault, as is well known, has been productively influential in anthropology and its many fields. When anthropologists used to construe “politics” as a distinct domain, beside that of “kinship,” “economy,” or “religion,” the work of Foucault challenged them to envision the political in each and every domain. However, anthropologists have predominantly reflected Foucault’s work in only so many ways, employing his

studies of schools, courtrooms, prisons, and clinics to expand their imaginations about “sites” for the production of the political. But if Foucault wrote ethnographies of “institutions,” he was actually a critic of the very notion of “the institution.” In the same way that he would not construe “the state” as a “site” or an “institution,” he also did not imagine medicine, the law, and education as distinct and limited domains. And yet, his work on the army, the hospital, and the psychoanalyst’s clinic has led itself to be read in a certain way, producing a forceful anthropological imaginary of the political as rationalized institutional practice. The figure of “discipline,” in Foucault’s sense, has triggered the fantasies of anthropologists about the political, seducing many to write ethnographies of the production of selfhoods through disciplinary institutional mechanisms. Institutional “discourses” have been the focus of ethnographies studying such diverse yet related topics like gender, immigration, illness, and so forth.

As much as this study builds on such contributions to the study of the political, it also attempts to break the boundaries and limitations in analyses that would bind the political in its seemingly rationalized institutional and discursive forms. In the context at hand, public life in 1990s Turkey, the political was not just a product of public discourses as fabricated in the obvious social institutions. As in the multiple garbs and guises implied by the metaphor “faces of the state” the political was precisely unsituable. There were no institutional or other boundaries that could be analyzed around it; no “site,” as such, for it. Public life, as I construe the term in this study, is not an institution or a site, imagined as domains with limitations. Instead, it is intended as a category that would allow the study of the political in its fleeting and intangible, transmogrified forms. In the chapters that follow, readers will be led through the production of the political not in the rationalized garb of institutional discourses and mechanisms, but in what I call its multiple metamorphoses. There is no face in which the political does not appear. And therefore the ethnographer must follow it in all its boundless guises. In fact, I take very seriously Foucault’s proposition that power is everywhere (1980). In the context at hand, the concept of power figures in multiple forms that muddy the circumscribed institutional arena. Moreover, it is possible to comment that the institutional site, so privileged in many recent anthropological studies of power, is a reflection of a particular and historically specific imaginary about power in which these anthropologists are complicit. In the intention of critiquing modernity, anthropologists have reproduced modernity’s own discourse about itself under the metaphor of the institution with its modes of rationalized practice and accountability.

Versions of such institutions exist and proliferate in contemporary Turkey. If I have not picked yet another institution to decipher its production of discourse, it is because the study of the political led me to a more messy

arena. Against the grain of the privileging of Foucault's notion of discourse in anthropological studies of the political, I would like to introduce here, via the work of Slavoj Žižek (1995), a study of "fantasy." Studies of political discourses have generally focused on the construction of the political, the analysis of which follows a deconstructive strategy. I would like to argue that there is an element of the Marxist notion of ideology in poststructuralist uses of the notion of discourse. Similar to Marxist hopes for a lifting of false consciousness with an exhibition of ideology, there is an implicit assumption, in deconstruction, of a revelation after the exposure of discursive construction. My argument, following Žižek, is that the political endures and survives deconstruction. The critical capacities employed in "ideology" or "discourse" critique are not only the prerogative of trained intellectuals. In the context for this ethnography, Turkey during the 1990s, critique was a central, common, and ordinary mode of relating to the state. People from all sections of society were constantly involved in criticizing various manifestations of the state in the most sophisticated manner. In other words, I argue that the so-called public in Turkey has already critiqued and deconstructed the state. And yet, simultaneous practices of reproduction, regeneration, and re-reification keep re-dressing "the state" in a variety of garbs. If the political survives critique and deconstruction, if the state endures, as it has, then the anthropologist must venture other arenas and analytical frameworks for the study of the political. For the very people who critique the state also reproduce it through their "fantasies" for the state.

Fantasy, according to Žižek's reading of Lacan (1995), is a psychic symptom that survives analysis, critique, or deconstruction. The work of "fantasy" generates unconscious psychic attachments to the very object (e.g., the state, the nation, public discourse) that has been deconstructed in the domains of consciousness. In other words, fantasy escapes deconstruction. It invisibly and intangibly regenerates and supports the reconstruction of the political, just as it had been critiqued. The concept of fantasy, more than the Foucauldian notion of discourse, enables us to study the enduring force of the political. Indeed, the symptom of the state survives sabotages of its power. How? Force and physical might is not the only answer. The state lives on in the fantasies of its subjects who would regenerate and reerect it after its multiple crises. As Begona Aretxaga (2000) has argued, the state is an object of psychic desire. It can be maintained even after it has been deconstructed with rational capacities and thought processes. Fantasy, and not a lack of consciousness about ideology or discourse, is what reconstitutes and regenerates state power. Fantasy does everyday maintenance work for the state.

The state does not figure in this book as a concrete entity, as if it were "citable in all its moments," to use Walter Benjamin's idea of totalizing

endeavors (1968). In using the work of Žižek, I engage with scholars who have deconstructed the state—studying it as an idea (Abrams 1988), a discourse (Mitchell 1991), or a fetish (Taussig 1992)—through the notion of fantasies for the state.² Fantasies for the state is a concept that may help us challenge the limitations of a deconstructionist approach.

Though Foucault construed discourse as a mechanism that transcends consciousness (that could not be available to consciousness), many anthropologists who have employed Foucault's work have researched discourse in the domains of consciousness. For example, anthropologists have studied institutional publications as well as the formalized narratives of their informants as sites for discourse. Such studies of the political that would confine the political within the domain of consciousness are not only misreadings of Foucault; they also leave the psychic and unconscious domain of the political unstudied. For, even when the political is deconstructed in the realms of consciousness, it survives and returns to life in psychic forms.

Imagine once again the central public square in Taksim, Istanbul, leading into Beyoğlu, one of the main centers for bookshops, cinemas, and cafés. Picture hundreds of people strolling down the main İstiklâl street in a leisurely manner as policemen stand in groups on the sides of the street. Visualize young people walking by the policemen, going in and out of the bookshops, sifting through magazines, checking out new books, listening to heavy metal, rock, or protest music. Imagine people sitting for hours on end in cafés, critically discussing politics in response to the public agenda or the news. Envision them unable to imagine that anything will change. Visualize them getting used to the crises in the state that they criticize. And picture them passing by the policemen, once again, months later, and not noticing them. Imagine them going in the coffeeshops once again. Are these traces of the public sphere in Habermas's sense, with its coffeeshops for the production of rationalized communication? Is this the archetypal domain for civil society?

In this book, I study "cynicism" as a central structure of feeling for the production and regeneration of the political in Turkey's public life. Cynicism, as a mechanism employed by members of the public in Turkey, is an approach that reproduces the political by default. But in contrast to Peter Sloterdijk (1988) and Žižek (1995) who would study cynicism as a mode that exists among formerly leftist intellectuals, I study it as a feeling of political existence in Turkey, a more common and ordinary way of managing existence in a realm of state power.³ Public life is precisely the arena for the production and maintenance of this approach to the political.

News has been central to the making of public life in contemporary Turkey. In fact, when I didn't follow the news during my fieldwork, I felt out of the loop when my informants were discussing politics and their lives as a reflection of it. References to the latest public events were picked

from and circulated through television reporting. Everyday discussions were dominantly focused on the agenda as set and presented in the news.

The culture of news, as I would like to call it, is a crucial component of this study of urban public life. But against the grain of discourse analysis in media studies, or in works that would institutionalize the media and study its formative power in creating public discourse, I study the force of a culture of news in inciting a political structure of feeling. Stuart Hall et al.'s (1978) study of "moral panic" about mugging in Britain, as such panic was created by the news, is much more insightful on this account than a study of the construction and dissemination of mediatic discourses.⁴ Against the rationalizing implication of the notion of public discourse, the framework of moral panic allows one to explore the nonrational dimensions of the political in public life. In this book, the media is not an object of study, but one important agent in the making of public life. The hype, scandal, and alarm produced by journalists around political issues in the 1990s created successive cultures of panic and fear in public life. In the culture of news, "the political" was turned into a consumer item. In the quick consumption of "political issues," under the influence of the media, public cultures of alarm were quickly followed by public amnesia. Issues that were central in public discussions for two months, were almost forgotten and pushed to the public unconscious very soon after. In his work on bureaucracy, Michael Herzfeld wrote, "I shall open the analysis with a brief account of my sources (especially newspapers) as representing the national level of discourse most clearly analogous with the play of gossip and reputation in the local community" (1992, 132). It is in this vein that I argue that television news becomes crucial for the analysis of this particular public formation.

Secularism in Public Life

The conflict over secularism was probably one of the most central issues that shaped public life in Turkey in the middle of the 1990s. In Turkey, a study of secularism cannot be dissociated from a study of the state, for secularism is the state's preferred self-representation or selected idea about itself. Secularism is not a neutral paradigm, but a state ideology as well as a hegemonic public discourse in contemporary Turkey. For example, the army has presented itself as the ultimate bastion and guard of founding leader Atatürk's secularism. Therefore, a study of the culture of secularism in Turkey is also, necessarily, a study of militarism, authoritarianism, and the culture of the state. Statism (or reverence for the state) in Turkey's public life is often represented in the garb and language of secularism.

But then, if secularism is the state's preferred narrative about itself, why study it? Why privilege the secularist / Islamist conflict in this ethnography of public life? Indeed, the conflict over secularism is the state's and the army's favorite story about the political in contemporary Turkey, against other issues (Kurds, Cyprus, and so forth). "The rise of Islamism" has been construed and presented as the most major threat to the integrity of the state in Turkey. A study of secularists and secularism in public life is a central topic of this book. But my intention is to problematize "secularism," rather than reproducing discourses and ideologies that employ its terms. A culture of the state was the context for the secularist/Islamist conflict in late-twentieth-century Turkey. Secularism and Islamism competed in a public arena, both wearing different faces of the state.

This book takes the apparent schism between secularists and Islamists as one of its topics, but it does not take this seeming "schism" for granted. Indeed, rather than framing the problem as a communal conflict between secularist and Islamist communities or social groups, I choose to problematize "secularism" itself. Most studies of conflicts over religion in public life have objectified "religion" as the problem, focusing on the religious community as an anomalous or emergent social group. Many studies of Islamists have been produced under such a framework, sometimes employing the dubious notion of "fundamentalism." Instead, in this work I take secularism to task because it is, by and large, the most dominant discourse that forms the basis of public life in Turkey. Beyond isolating Islamists as a community or Islamism as a phenomenon, I study Islamists working within conditions of possibility of a public life dominated by secularist discourses. Islamism in Turkey is imbued with the language of secularism. In fact, I argue that secularist fantasies about Islamists in public life have been complicit in producing versions of Islamism in Turkey. So every comment on Islamism in what follows should be read, as well, as a comment on "secularism," challenging the very analytical distinction of secularity versus religion. I argue that "secularity" and "religion" are in a dialectic. The relationality between secularism and Islamism is therefore at the conceptual center of this book. Here, in relation to Islamists, secularists, too, emerge as main informants. If secularists in Turkey would like to present their life practices as transcultural or neutral against Islamists, I problematize their references to "culture" as much as I do those of Islamists.

In the 1990s, public life was a central arena for the reconfiguration of the meaning of "Turkish culture" and "nativity." In debate with one another, secularists and Islamists pit different interpretations of Turkish culture against each other. They argued over Turkey's proper "region"; they disagreed on Turkey's positionality vis-à-vis Europe. The chapters in this book study this conflict over Turkish culture. And at no point do the references to culture appear stable.

The Turkish Astronomer and the Little Prince

In a reflective moment, the narrator of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince* (1943) remarks,

I have serious reason to believe that the planet from which the little prince came is the asteroid known as B-612.

This asteroid has only once been seen through the telescope. That was by a Turkish astronomer, in 1909.

On making his discovery, the astronomer had presented it to the International Astronomical Congress, in a great demonstration. But he was in Turkish costume, and so nobody would believe what he said.

Grown-ups are like that . . .

Fortunately, however, for the reputation of Asteroid B-612, a Turkish dictator made a law that his subjects, under pain of death, should change to European costume. So in 1920 the astronomer gave his demonstration all over again, dressed with impressive style and elegance. And this time everybody accepted his report (12).

Since 1943, it is possible to amend Saint-Exupéry's story. I have observed that even when the Turkish astronomer is dressed in European costume, "grown-ups" do not believe in his report. These grown-ups—let us call them anthropologists—still imagine that the layers of European costume are transparent to an underlying Turkish culture. And so, in spite of all his trials and tribulations, style and elegance, the astronomer is ignored.

The problem of positivism in the politics and the study of culture is one of the framing questions of this book. Indeed, there is a residual positivism with regard to "culture" even in those ethnographies that have employed the theoretical tools of deconstruction. Examples include studies that, after Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), have targeted Western discourses and anthropological categories as their subject for critique in the anthropology of the Middle East (e.g., Mitchell 1988, 2000; Rabinow 1989; Messick 1993; Abu-Lughod 1998). Indeed, the critique of modernity, whether it be of colonialism or of Westernization, has been the project of a certain anthropology and post-Orientalist scholarship. Yet such projects have risked reproducing essentialism in leaving a precipitation of cultural authenticity or tradition underneath the layers of European costume, thereby overlapping, by default, with cultural revivalisms or nationalisms in the contexts studied. Many a critique of representation, employing post-structuralism, has ended up implying that a reified discourse of modernity is a misrepresentation, stopping the process of deconstruction in its tracks. From such a reading, some of the people whose lives inform this ethnography, "secular Turks," could be understood to be misrepresentations of themselves, in

contrast to “Islamist Turks,” who, claiming to revive the culture of the Ottoman-Islamic past, could be studied as representations and representatives of Turkish culture or nativity. For this paradoxical political return to culturalism in the postcolonial critique of modernity, Deniz Kandiyoti has coined the term “neo-Orientalism” (1997, 114).

And yet, a critique of the critique of modernity does not in turn, in canceling the negatives, have to be an affirmation or reification of modernity or of politics constructed in the name of modernity. Instead, following Abdellah Hammoudi’s strategy of “double-edged critique” (1997), I study power in both its Western and Turkish references. There is something missing from the paradigm that would study “the West,” “modernity,” or “the anthropologist” as representations of “power” and examine “the rest” as “culture.” Here, I attempt to engage the context of research with a study of power through and through. The study of the political must be dissociated from the culturalist reservoir that is implicit in the framework of postcoloniality and the critique of modernity. Even if represented as Western or Turkish in specific historical contingencies, power belongs to neither culture. The attempt, here is to work against the grain of both Western and local discourses of power.

Though as of 1999 the European Commission has granted a candidacy to Turkey, the idea of Turkey’s otherness to Europe persists. With a long-standing European historiography that assigned the Ottoman Empire to “the East,” “Turkey and Europe” are still conceived both within and outside Turkey as a contradiction in terms. In contrast, I argue that there is no inherent conflict or necessary difference between Turkey and Europe, Islam and the West. Ethnography that draws a radical distinction between “native” and “Western” categories, as in the project of cultural relativism, will find itself at sea in the study of Turkey, given the Ottoman Empire and Turkey’s historical placement within and vis-à-vis Europe. The cultural relativist project of analytically distinguishing Western or anthropological categories from local or native ones would be limiting in the study of Turkey, as it is arguably problematic in the study of other comparable historical contexts. It is not possible, in the context at hand, to distinguish native from Western points of view because there is no space where they have not been integrally and historically engaged with one another. Turks, like Arabs and Jews, have been Europe’s internal and not external others. The Ottoman Empire was central to European history, intrinsically related to and informed by Byzantine forms of governance, and rivaling the Hapsburgs. And yet, Turks and Muslims are still interpreted as counter- or extra-European. To challenge the notion of Turkey as “non-European” is *not* to reproduce the terms of Turkish nationalist discourse with its Westernist aspirations, as in the project of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, but to write the meaning of “Europe” anew through the prism of a crucial internal

other.⁵ For the very meaning and connotations of Europe would have to change if Muslim and Jewish histories were placed at its historical center.

The history of Turkey has generally been conceived, in scholarship as well as in political discourse, as a history of “Westernization,” whether it be in secularist praise or Islamicist criticism (e.g., Lewis 1969; Berkes 1964). We do, indeed, have at hand a history of radical state-imposed Westernizing reforms. Yet I argue that the category “Westernization,” as a category of historical analysis, is a positivist notion that assumes an original distinction and incommensurability between a constructed “East” and “West.” It is interesting that there should be such an implicit overlap between modernizationist / Orientalist constructs of “Westernization” and postmodernist / post-Orientalist references to “modernity.”⁶ The concept of Westernization, like notions of a major historical rupture with modernity, is based on the assumption, by default, that an essentially separate “culture” existed prior to the development or the shift. In turn, to write against the grain of the notion of Westernization in the historical analysis and trajectory of Turkey is not to legitimize the politics of state-regulated Westernization, nor to suggest that “anything goes.” It is only to set in train a long-term ethnographic and political process of unmasking categories that reproduce claims to originality.

The Construction of “Turkish Culture”

The argument of this book is that “Turkish culture,” as such, does not exist. From the vantage point of the politics of culture between Islamists and secularists, when the meaning and components of “Turkish cultural practice” have been debated, produced, transformed, and repeatedly displaced, it would be misplaced to employ the notion of Turkish culture as an anthropological or analytical category.

The notions of Turkey, Turks, and Turkish culture, arguably like other terms of state or identity, have been entangled in a history of multiple constructions. According to historian Cemal Kafadar (1995), “Turchia” was not a term through which Ottoman subjects identified themselves or their polity in the early Ottoman centuries. Ottomans called themselves “Rumi,” a term adopted from the Byzantines. The self-appellation “Turk” was derived, through the formative period of Turkish nationalism, in relationship with Europe. “Turkey” and “Turks” were the terms used by Europeans to classify the Ottomans, and when these terms did not have a place in the self-identification of subjects of the Ottoman Empire, they came to signify cultural identity under a nationalist construction.

Thus, an anthropological search for Turkish culture in its own “native” terms, or the project of understanding “the native’s point of view” (e.g.,

Geertz 1983) is set to be reconsidered. “Turkishness,” arguably like other cultural categories, was already and always a misnomer. It was never a category that existed independently of Ottoman relations with Europe. Not even in the formative stages of the Ottoman state, in the fourteenth century, was there such pristine “Turkish” cultural space.

Far from being natural or straightforward concepts, then, the notions of Turkey, Turks, and Turkish culture are products of historical agency and contingency. To situate these notions more accurately, one would have to turn to the early stages of Turkey’s national formation. Late-twentieth-century discussions on nativity make references to constructions of “Turkish culture” in early-twentieth-century nationalism. With the foundation of an independent republic to replace Ottoman sovereignty, there was an effort to define what was culturally native to the new polity, “Turkey.” The founders of the republic, led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, aspired to Westernization, following the example of the Young Turks before them. But as they were informed by the European Enlightenment, the forerunners of the idea of “the Republic of Turkey” were also implicated in the contingency and discourse of rising nationalisms. The Ottoman Empire had disintegrated by the early twentieth century, and, giving up the project of sustaining the Empire, Ottoman-Turkish leaders geared efforts to constitute a nation-state in the model of Balkan and Arab nationalisms that had developed in their midst. Nationalisms, as they were formulated at the time, were based on primordialist claims to represent the unitary and original “culture” of circumscribed pieces of territory.⁷ To be legitimate in a world of nationalist discourse, a nation-state had to have claims to cultural continuity between the past and the present. The builders of “Turkey” had mobilized themselves against European powers who were partitioning the remaining portions of the Ottoman Empire among themselves. But they had also organized, with Republicanist aspirations, against the Ottoman dynasty and the sultan who had surrendered to the Europeans. The Republicanists did not have much interest in identifying the new nation-state with the culture of the Ottoman Empire. And yet, for their nationalism to be commensurable with the primordialist discourses that abounded under the conditions of possibility at the time, connection to a certain past had to be claimed. The paradox was resolved when the early nationalists began to suggest links between the Westernized (or “modern”) national culture that they wanted to institute and the culture of Turkic groups in ancient Central Asia.⁸ As Deniz Kandiyoti has insightfully noted, “the ‘modern’ was thus often justified as the more ‘authentic’ and discontinuity presented as continuity” in efforts to reconcile Europeanization with nationalism (1993, 379).⁹

Memory of a Turkic past in Central Asia was nonexistent among inhabitants of Anatolia in the early twentieth century.¹⁰ Moreover, with the migra-

tions, multiple conversions, and intercultural marriages that characterized Ottoman society, the Muslim individuals who came predominantly to compose the citizens of “Turkey” were of mixed ancestry, not necessarily speaking or identifying as “Turkish.”¹¹ But in the interest of claiming a shared “national culture,” the founders of the republic constructed links with “the culture of Central Asia.”

Under the new construct of “Turkey,” the capital city Ankara was founded, railroads were designed, schools were built, the postal system was changed, measurements were reformulated, the legal system was reframed, borders were patrolled, soldiers were conscripted, women were employed in the labor force, and so forth. All of this material construction took place as nationalists claimed organic links between modernizing implementations and national culture. And to a significant extent, the new notions of Turkey and its “culture” were internalized by citizens of the republic. Through enrollment in state schools, attendance in Community Houses,¹² subjection to army discipline, and exposure to radio, newspapers, novels, and the like, people came to organize their lives, to a certain extent, around the new notion of what being Turkish (and hence, modern) was now about.

“The Anthropology of Turkey”

“The anthropology of Turkey,” conceptualized as such, has been composed primarily by British-trained structuralists. The project, for the likes of Paul Stirling, was to describe structural survivals of the Westernizing history of Turkey. The “Turkish village,” in his terms, conceived as a unit of analysis, was a perfect setting for such an enterprise.¹³ Here, one would collect statistical information on society, kinship, agricultural systems, and economy to be generalized into indices. The material product of positive scientific research would be taken to reflect Turkish society or Turkish social structure. Younger anthropologists introduced history into their depictions of Turkish society, producing ethnographies of “structure and change.” The state figures in these more recent accounts as an entity that is essentially external to village life.¹⁴ Change is a new but alien phenomenon. Structure and change are conceptualized as entities distinct and dissonant from one another. The entry of American-trained anthropologists in the field did not radically shift the project of the anthropology of Turkey. Cultural anthropologists have only located their anthropological “truths” in different sites. Rather than presenting an economic average, a household count, or mean kinship figures as an account of society, Carol Delaney, for example, has studied the gendered cosmological meanings that villagers associate with the symbols of seed and soil to come up with an account of Turkish culture.¹⁵

Approaches that would imagine an underlying Turkish culture are preva-

lent among scholars in cultural studies, too. Kevin Robins, for example, positions himself as a critic of Westernism, Westernization, and Western discourses in Turkey. He writes, “As much as it has been shaped by the assimilation of Western culture, modern Turkish identity ‘is also a product of various negations’: Turkish society became ‘practiced in the art of repression’” (1996, 68). By employing the terms of “negation” and “repression,” does Robins have an argument about what is (or was) “positive” to Turkish culture and identity? Members of the Islamist movement, in Robins’s reading, exemplify such positive identity: “Once the psychic repression had been lifted, lost identities and experiences began to be recovered” (1996, 74). In critique of “Westernized Turks” and in reference to Islamists, Robins writes, “Of course, the real people could never be banished” (1996, 71). Robins’s work accentuates a latent nativism in the critique of modernity.¹⁶

Faces of the state avoids the conventionalized anthropological project of describing Turkish culture and society. There is no such essential “Turkishness” to be found, no Westernizing curtain to pull back and reveal a hidden cultural reservoir. From this point of view, attempts using interpretivist methodologies to understand “culture” share a project with structuralist measures to chart “society.”¹⁷ The material presented in this book works against the grain of the essentializing notion of the “anthropology of Turkey.” Instead, in following Stuart Hall’s (1993) radical social constructionism, this ethnography describes enactments, productions, and contestations over culture.¹⁸ In contrast to Robins, Hall would not allow a notion of an original culture to appear through the back door after attempts at deconstruction.

The object of anthropological inquiry, the study of “local” or “native culture” is critically juxtaposed in this book with a study of the intrinsic entanglement of culture with the political. But the deconstruction of the notion of Turkish culture is not activated, here, from the position of the anthropologist alone. It is the experiences of the people whose lives inform this ethnography that predicate an unsettling of the idea of Turkish culture (and therefore, of the anthropological category of culture) with their politics of culture. As the content and meaning of Turkishness is created, contested, and consumed, so-called Turkish culture undergoes constant and several displacements.¹⁹ The Islamist and secularist characters represented in this book are involved in questioning one another’s life practices in a politics of culture. The narrative here attempts to match their experiential unknowing (or lack of ground) with an epistemological unknowing.

The Not-Too-Native Anthropologist

Recently, it has become an anthropological convention to involve the ethnographer’s subject-position in the writing of the ethnographic text (e.g., Clifford and Marcus 1986). While I agree with the critique of “objectivity”

that motivates “anthropology at home,” I am uncertain about the category of “the native anthropologist,” which it, by implication, celebrates. The notion of “the native anthropologist” has been problematized and complicated by anthropologists who have positioned themselves as “halfies” (e.g., Narayan 1993, Abu-Lughod 1988). But I think that the concept requires further criticism. I would not like to position myself as the “native” critic of Western discourses on Turkey, a role I would have found easy to assume, having “returned home” to Istanbul to do my research. Rather, I attempt to deconstruct the notion of the native. The celebration of the native anthropologist and anthropology at home falls far short of problematizing the notion of “nativity” and “the native’s point of view,” which has informed nationalisms as well as anthropology. For there is no space, at least in the context here studied, where nativity is not always and already entangled in political discourses of exclusion. The anthropology that would privilege the native anthropologist, in a “progressive” attempt to unsettle anthropology’s external / western gaze, cannot be disentangled from local nationalist discourses that would employ the terms of nativity for constructed and implemented cultural division.

The notion of the native is not an innocent concept and neither is a native positionality. As a person of “minority” status in Turkey, I was not perceived as a “proper native” by many of my informants, whether Islamist or secularist. In encounters in my own city Istanbul, the first thing that incited curiosity on an everyday basis was my name. Immediately, people expressed surprise to hear Turkish spoken as a native language by someone with a non-Turkish name. Many of my informants were meeting someone from what they knew as “the non-Muslim minorities” (*gayrimüslimler*, *ekaliyet*) for the first time in their lives. Some, especially Islamists, were puzzled by the presence of “a Jew” (*Yahudi*, *Musevi*) in their midst. In all cases, upon meeting me, people would ask, “Where are you from?” “From here, from Turkey,” I would respond. “How long have your ancestors lived in these lands?” would be another question. I would be forced to respond in primordialist logic that “some of them were Greek-speaking Byzantine Jews, others arrived in the Ottoman Empire after the Inquisitions in Spain.” “Does your family still live here?” I would be asked by informants who would simply assume the transitory nature of non-Muslim minorities in Turkey. “How come you speak Turkish so well?” “Turkish is one of my native languages,” I would say. My positionality as “native” was ambiguous, from my informants’ nativist points of view. They would simply consider themselves as more native than I. In the available conditions of possibility, I, like others of comparable status, was an object of othering nativist discourses in Turkey.²⁰ This book goes beyond those that would reify “the native” or “the native anthropologist,” in its attempts to problematize the notion of nativity in anthropology and in nationalist discourses.

Researching the Political

The questions posed in this book demand that I employ a different and nonconventional research strategy. Nationalism and cultural politics in Turkey could be studied with a “methodology” that would have recorded articulated, conscious, and formalized narratives of secularist, Islamist, nationalist, and / or statist informants. Moreover, such a study, which would have expansively used the “sources,” could have documented the place, placement, and context of secularists and Islamists as “communities,” a notion that still dominates the anthropological imagination.

A study of public life in urban Turkey, such as this one, would have been very limited, however, if constrained by such methodologies and frameworks. “The political” is forceful in a manner that is available, and yet, also not available to the consciousness of its subjects. Studies researching “the political” in informants’ consciously articulated narratives or ideologies (to analyze it as elements of “a discourse”) are only partially revealing. Both my secularist and Islamist informants were ready to give me framed ideological accounts of their political views, their identities, and their cultures. But if I had focused my research on these proliferating narratives and counter-narratives between secularist and Islamist communities, the political would have slipped away.

As an imaginary register for research, the aphorisms of Walter Benjamin are deeply insightful. In his “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (1968), Benjamin has argued that “only a redeemed mankind” would be able to study a situation, a context, or a concept in its totality. Instead, Benjamin grasps knowledge as it appears, in his terms, in the form of “flashes,” as they dart by. Moving beyond research that presents totalizing conscious accounts as exemplary of cultural or political narratives, Benjamin incites us to maintain ourselves within streams of consciousness: that which is not stable, not re-articulable, but which blinks, momentarily shows itself, and escapes (see Pandolfo 1997). Benjamin’s aphorisms are much more insightful as a strategy of tracing the political than the research strategy or anthropological methodology that would constrain and locate the political in place. They push one to study the political against processes and frameworks that rationalize or normalize it (see Aretxaga 2000). Research on public life in Turkey—the panic, the uproar, the alarm, the excess—requires just such a tracing of the political against accounts that would normalize it. As transient and ephemeral as they are, states of semiconsciousness or “fantasy,” which are of interest to me in this book, require such an imaginary of research. More than an anthropology that locates sites for research, single or multiple (Marcus 1995), Benjamin’s writings urge one to imagine the intangible: that which escapes formalized articulation, nor-

malization, citation, siting. In what follows, informants' entanglements with the political are followed through different and simultaneous forms of consciousness: crisply articulated, hazy, or submerged.

How does one research the movement of public life? What method is suitable for a study of the force of fantasy in generating the political? In chapter 1, I study humor, rumor, imaginary stories, projections, and irrational fears as intangible sites for the making of the political in Istanbul's public life. The attention to out-of-focus or fuzzy consciousness is followed through in subsequent chapters. Chapters on the state move with the flow of public life in Istanbul—from a farewell party for a soldier-to-be to the celebration of Republic Day—to study the phantasmatic forces that effect and the psychic work that regenerates the state. The strategy of research is to sense and follow the movement of public life in Istanbul in order to grasp the flowing, fleeting, or submerged forces that produce and regenerate the political.