Chapter 5

Anthropology in Turkey: Impressions for an Overview

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INTRODUCTION

This overview on Turkish social/cultural anthropology is confined to the current status of the discipline, along with a brief political and historical background. Thus, it is by no means an exhaustive study aiming to cover all anthropologists and their work in and on Turkey. However, it can provide an insight for those who are not closely acquainted with the topic. Taking the venture of representation, I have to state that this essay is written from my perspective and it can neither claim a totally neutral position—nor deny the selectivity in perception. I will incorporate the views and assessments of the third generation Turkish anthropologists in the academy, relying on the recent discussions and debates in related literature. In addition to my personal and professional experiences in the field since the mid 1980s, I asked some academics on the current status of anthropology in Turkey via email, telephone, and in informal interviews. When put together, the following collage came into view.

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

The origins of anthropology in Turkey as an institutionalized research activity dates back to 1925, shortly after the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923. Magnarella and Turkdogan (1976: 265) state that:
Social anthropology in Turkey initially developed within the atmosphere of nationalistic purpose. The Anthropology Institute (Antropoloji Enstitüsü) also known as the Center for Anthropological Research in Turkey (Türkiye Antropoloji Tetkikat Merkezi), was established in 1925 in the Faculty of Medicine of Istanbul University. Most of its research dealt with physical anthropological topics, though it did publish some folkloric studies by George Dumezil (1928), who was Professor of the History of Religions at Istanbul University from 1925 to 1931, and a socio-statistical study of suicide in Istanbul by Max Bonnafous (1928), who taught sociology at Istanbul University at about the same time. The first real social anthropological work to emanate from the Institute was Kemal Gungor’s *Ethno-anthropological Study of the South Anatolian Yuruks* (1940–41).

From a historical perspective, a developed rural sociology overlaps with anthropology in Turkey. Until the 1960s anthropological research was dominated by rural sociology in the form of both ethnographic and monographic village studies conducted by the pioneers of Turkish sociology Niyazi Berkes, Behice Boran, and İbrahim Yasa, Nermin Erdentuş—the first female anthropologist, and by Mümtaz Turhan, a psychologist, between 1940 and 1960 (Magnarella et al, 1976; Erdentuş et al. 2000/2). The interest in the study of folklore in Turkey dates back to the second half of the nineteenth century. According to Başgöz (1998), the first scientific study was connected with the establishment in the early 1920s of the Turkology Institute at Istanbul University by Fuad Köprülü. These studies were instituted in 1947, when the Chair of Folklore was founded by Pertev Naili Boratav, once an assistant of Fuad Köprülü, at Ankara University. Shortly thereafter, in 1948, Boratav was forced to leave due to the political pressures of the day and the department was closed down. The rebirth of the department as an independent one was not until 1980. Thus, there was an inactive period in folklore studies between 1950 and 1980 (Birkalan 2000/4; Başgöz 1998; Timuroğlu 1995).

After the 1960s, Turkey was dramatically affected by two coup d’etats (in 1971 and 1980). The impact of these obstructions on the social sciences and for the social scientists in the country requires particular scrutiny, one which lies beyond the scope of this essay. However, it is important to note that during this period, along with the establishment of the Higher Education Council in 1981, higher education had been restructured and directed towards a rigorously centralized system. This move, combined with the restrictive and oppressive character of the period, gave rise to an academic brain drain from the universities. In the post-1980 period, there was a radical shift toward privatization/neoliberalization of the economy and the society by all means. Özbudun (1993: 206) states that, “(W)ith the transition back to democratic politics in 1983, there has been a sudden surge of interest in liberal values and an increasing emphasis on civil society institutions.” After the privatiza-
tion of the higher education sector, the first private university, Bilkent University, was established in Ankara in 1984. However, it was in 1997 when the first anthropology department was instituted at the private Yeditepe University in Istanbul. As of today, out of fifty-three state universities, six offer training in anthropology, one in folklore, and there is one anthropology department out of the twenty-four private universities in Turkey. Anthropologists who are employed in anthropology or in other social science departments have weak organizational ties. Erdentug and Magneralla (2000/2: 63) refer to the fact that: “Turkey’s first Anthropology Association was not created until 1992. It has held meetings with either a single speaker or a panel of speakers two or three times a year since then. It also puts out a news bulletin to facilitate communication among members. According to its organizer, Nephan Saran, in 1997 this Istanbul-based association had 125 members, most of them being females.” The same association organized the First National Anthropology Congress in 1999, and the Second National Anthropology Congress in June 2004 in Istanbul (see <http://www.antropoloji.gen.tr/>).

CURRENT STATUS OF THE DISCIPLINE

Anthropology as an academic discipline in Turkey at present displays an eclectic and fragmented character. It is difficult to observe cohesiveness or dominance of any anthropological tradition. However, it may be possible to distinguish some tenors in the field, such as the optimist and pessimist views on the current status of the discipline. Some Turkish anthropologists are optimistic by referring to the quantity and the quality of the anthropological studies in Turkey, while others are pessimistic due to the small underdeveloped structure of the field and the weak organizational ties of its members. A further pattern could be found between the Western and Turkish trained anthropologists, in the context of their epistemological and methodological orientations; while the former is practicing nonpositivist fieldwork, the latter is more involved with a positivist, survey type of research. Another observation is related with “colonized minds,” that is, anthropologists who are in favor of their own knowledge production and the degree of authenticity in the studies as opposed to the extensive usage of “imported knowledge.” In addition to these tenors, some of the Turkish anthropologists appear to conceive anthropology beyond its disciplinary boundaries, that is “anthropology as a worldview,” as opposed to disciplinary chauvinism. In this context, worldview may refer to a particular understanding of the other, with reference to a non-positivist approach including an emphatic and interpersonal dimension between humans (Sirman 2002; Aydin 1998).
Though the views and perceptions of the “insiders” within Turkish anthropology might help us to assess the current status of the discipline, their anthropological work (see bibliographies in Güvenç 1971; Erdentuğ 1985; Erdentuğ et al. 2000/2) and their contribution to the discipline still remains to be studied. Here, I will confine myself to the current discussions and controversial issues within the discipline. There are several very comprehensive studies of the literature on the history and development of the discipline in Turkey. There is a very comprehensive study on the development of anthropology in Turkey from the nineteenth century to 1972–73 written by Paul J. Magnarella and Orhan Türkdoğan (1976), the other is a bio-bibliographic documentary study of the past and present of social anthropology in the Turkish universities written by Aygen Erdentuğ and Paul J. Magnarella (2000/2). There are also other works such as bibliography of anthropology in Turkey from 1935 to 1983 by Aygen Erdentuğ (1985), a short bibliography of ethnological and anthropological studies written by Bozkurt Güvenç (1971), and a study of the pioneers of anthropology in Turkey by Aygen Erdentuğ (1998), as well as numerous periodicals such as: *Folklor/Edebiyat* (Folklore/Culture), *Türk Kültürü* (Turkish Culture), and *Antropoloji* (Anthropology). A number of observations about the current status of anthropology in Turkey may be extracted from these studies:

1. First, there is no consensus on the current status of the discipline in the country. Aydin (1998) presents an optimistic view regarding anthropological studies in Turkey, by referring to various studies on identity, ethnic or community monographs, the tradition of *Volk- skunde*, the anthropology of rituals, the anthropology of religion, political anthropology, kinship studies, social change, village and shantytown monographs, and study of local traditions, as well as general and theoretical books on anthropology in addition to hundreds of articles and theses written on these topics with which he opposes Eksigil’s (1998) comment about a lack of anthropology in Turkey. Whereas, Sirman does not find the already existing studies sufficient enough to talk about anthropology in Turkey.

2. The low impact of anthropology in Turkish public life and in the making of social policies is a widely shared observation among the third generation anthropologists like Atay (2000), Aydin (2000/1) Özmen, (2000/1), and Gürsoy (1998). According to these anthropologists, anthropology and anthropologists in Turkey hardly ever take part in the local public debates and in mass media; it is a silent discipline. Thus, there is no dissemination of anthropological knowledge and views in the society. Discussions and debates seem
to stay within the literature and academic milieu. Besides, Atay (2000/1) argues that anthropology in Turkey faces a serious institutionalization problem and there is lack of information as to "what is anthropology?" for a vast amount of people in the society.

(3) The role of an official ideology over social sciences in general and on the studies of anthropologists is a subject of controversy. In this context, there are further ideological conflicts and debates among academics, due to their various perceptions of the relation between academic freedom and the state. It is a hot topic and critically elaborated by the anthropologists in the relevant literature (Aydın 2000/2; Gürsoy 2000/2; Özmen, 2000/2). Regarding this subject, it should be noted that at the time of the two military interventions, anthropologists, like all other social scientists, were viewed with a suspicion by the military authorities. Furthermore, in 1971, the Anthropology Research Area within the Sociology Department, and, in 1980, the Anthropology Department at Hacettepe University, were almost closed.

(4) Another dispute that takes place in the literature among the anthropologists and the social scientists in Turkey is on the notion of "imported science." Cigdem Kagıtçibasi (1986) points at the extensive usage of Western concepts in the Turkish social sciences, a view that is widely acknowledged by many social scientists. Higher education has always been criticized by some academics (Kiray 1986; Öncü 1986; Kagıtçibasi 1986) with reference to the type of education dominant and common at the universities. It has been argued that heavy reliance on imported knowledge and foreign concepts in anthropology leads to a confusion by ignoring their academic and historical contexts within the Anglo-American and European anthropological traditions (Güvenç 1971: 98). In other words, anthropology at home requires "decolonized minds" and context specific production of knowledge from a cross-cultural perspective. According to Nalbantoğlu (2003: 29), in the academic world that is surrounded by global circumstances, there is the reproduction of imported cultural products. The hegemony of Western discourses on social sciences could be also associated with the lack of its own knowledge production in the periphery. Hannerz (1998: 167) observes the same in Swedish anthropology, "(F)ar from being brainwashed by the perspectives of foreign scholars, Swedish anthropologists may have some difficulty in pinning down and problematizing the peculiarities of their own compatriots."
(5) There is agreement among the native and foreign researchers that Turkish sociology and anthropology have been dominated all through their establishment by a positivist methodology, thus, using questionnaires and interviews instead of participant observation and long term field work. It is difficult to confine positivism exclusively to a research methodology; rather, it is viewed as an ideology (Belge 2004). The identification of positivism with the modernization and Westernization project of Turkey has been discussed extensively by the academics (Magneralla et al. 1976; Özdalga 1990; Aydm 1998; Erdentuğ 2001). The reflection of this ideology on the social sciences still remains to be overcome since it is difficult to talk about a paradigmatic shift toward a more qualitative research. Particularly in anthropology, the dominance of this paradigm leads to a confrontation between academics during academic promotions. An anthropologist who favors the positivist methodology may easily reject a candidate for doing reflexive anthropology.

(6) Anthropologists trained in the British and US traditions and employed at Turkish universities may constitute another category in the field. Nükhet Sirman, a British trained social anthropologist, writing extensively on feminism, the status of women, nationalism, and gender in Turkey, and currently working in the Sociology Department at Bogazici University, evaluates the present status of the discipline as follows:

(A)ctually, there is a development of a new anthropology as far as my observations are concerned. Some of my students, for example are doing research in Syria and Egypt. There is an effort on doing new studies in the field of urban anthropology and there are approaches merging sociology and anthropology that are mostly feminist. In my opinion, it is still difficult to talk about anthropology in Turkey since the present studies are not adequate in that respect.⁴

There are not many Western trained Turkish anthropologists; however, the British trained anthropologists outnumber those trained in the US (see Erdentuğ et al. 2000/2). The British connection could partly be related to Paul Stirling⁵ who influenced the growth of the discipline and supervised a group of Turkish social scientists both in Ankara, London and Canterbury. Only one US trained Turkish anthropologist, Emine Onaran İncirlioğlu,⁶ worked with Stirling during his fieldwork in Turkey in 1986. The commonality between these anthropologists is that almost all Western trained Turkish anthropologists of the post-1980s did long term fieldwork in and out of Turkey.
FROM ANTHROPOLOGY DEPARTMENTS TO INTERDISCIPLINARY CENTERS

It is possible to observe some new formations with respect to conducting qualitative, critical and reflexive research. Besides the bureaucratic structure and rigidly defined research fields within the hierarchical structure of the classical departments, there has been a shift since the late 1990s toward research centers both in the public and private universities based in Ankara and Istanbul. In these centers, there are interdisciplinary and cross-cultural studies on migration, women, political, and region oriented research (see Erdemli 2000). Women and cultural studies require especially more attention when compared to others, with respect to their emphasis on developing a critical perspective in the social sciences in an institutionalized way. These centers are part of nationwide and worldwide networks and financed by independent national and international resources due to their international connections. It is through these centers that a breaking away from positivism, hierarchy and patriarchy could be observed to a certain extent.

Women studies have been carried out in Turkey since the early 1990s; at present, there are thirteen women studies programs in public universities, though the ones in Ankara and Istanbul are more active (see <http://kasaum.ankara.edu.tr>). These programs promote qualitative and interdisciplinary research on various aspects of economic, social, and political issues related with the status of women in society, and the development of academic feminism. According to Sancar (2003), academic feminism with its interdisciplinary and critical approach could help other social sciences to overcome their “scientific blindness.” Ethnography and participant observation are not dominated by anthropologists anymore. Particularly in the field of women studies, sociologists extensively do reflexive anthropology, but it is still not possible to speak of the existence of a feminist anthropology in Turkey. However, this break from positivism has added a gender dimension to the work of anthropological studies, which was missing before the 1970s.

Cultural studies constitute another break from positivism toward critical studies. The emergence of cultural studies in Turkey dates back to the late 1990s as an undergraduate program at Sabanci University (Schneider 2002), and at the graduate level at Bilgi and Bogazici Universities, in Istanbul and at Middle East Technical University in Ankara. According to Pultar and Kirtunc (2004: 129): “It must be said that cultural studies seems to have been invented especially for Turkish society as its emphasis on examining issues of power and social difference makes it a particularly apt approach to exploring and critiquing the decidedly hierarchical and patriarchal character of the latter.” The formation of the Group for Cultural Studies in Turkey
(see <http://www.cstgroup.org>) in 1999 by a majority of women academ­
ics from diverse universities is an alternative formation for anthropology
departments. This group promotes new approaches and understandings
toward the study of cultural diversity in Turkey. Its ambitious task was de-
scribed by Pultar and Kirtunc as follows:

The inter-university Group set for itself from the beginning an agenda that was
meant to seek ways to apply cultural theory to the cultures of Turkey (Turkish,
Jewish, Greek, Armenian, Circassian, Laz, Kurdish and others such as the Ro-
mans), and Turks (in Turkey, in Europe and the West in general, in the former
Ottoman territories in the Balkans and the Middle East, and in the former So-
viets territories in Central Asia and the Caucasus, and in Iran and China); and
if possible to generate new theory and methodology. (2004: 140)

Even if this breathtaking geographical inclusiveness of the group’s scope re-
 mains to be seen in practical terms, its ambition to revitalize and renew the
already existing studies on culture might serve as an inspiration for future
studies and help to free the encapsulated Turkish anthropological studies.

Migration studies are mostly conducted outside the anthropology de-
partments in Turkey and either by sociologists or anthropologists. Political
science, sociology, and international relations departments as well as recently
established migration research centers\(^7\) constitute the institutional and organi-
zational logistics to the studies in migration. It should be also noted that
Turkish anthropologists\(^8\) who are employed in various European universi-
ties conduct extensive fieldwork among the Turkish immigrants in Europe.
It may be argued that Turkey is a country of people in motion. International
emigration, transnational connections, internal migration, refugee, and trans-
sit flows constitute diverse patterns of human mobility in Turkey. The study
of the diverse form of this mobility is crucial for local and global dynamics.
In the Turkish context, there is a focus on urban anthropology, ethnographic
researches in the squatter settlements (Erman 1998; Erder 1996), as well as
quantitative studies (see *Internal Migration in Turkey* 1998).

Fieldwork in the neighboring countries requires financial and bureau-
cratic support. Due to the geopolitical location of Turkey, the study of the
region is of the utmost importance in political and social sciences. Field re-
search conducted in the Balkan countries, Central Asian countries, Ukraine,
and Russia is sustained by the Center for Black Sea and Central Asia, founded
in 1993 at the Middle East Technical University, a state university based in
Ankara. The director of the Center, who is a British trained social anthropol-
ogist, Ayşe Ayata (2000), describes the activities of the Center as follows:

We are trying to send to these countries the young researchers as much as pos-
sible. We make sure that our students learn the language of the countries on
which they are studying. For example, a student who we send to Uzbekistan learns both Uzbek and a little Russian there. Moreover, he/she lives there for a considerable span of time ... One should acquire knowledge not only by reading about the place, but being there. Until now our studies are concentrated mostly on the subjects of family, family culture, women, youth, juvenile culture. We have conducted a study on the local culture in Uzbekistan, as well as in Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Ankara, Turkey. We have conducted a series of comparative research on family. Another important issue for us was the phenomenon of migration. It is highly important for Turkey. We are working on both the international emigration and migration from urban to rural areas. For instance, we tried to find answers to the questions where do Ahiska Turks live and whence they immigrate? (Ayata 2000)

The above mentioned examples of interdisciplinary studies, among others, provide an opportunity for young academics, as prospective researchers, to undertake non-positivistic, agency oriented, qualitative research opportunities as compared to the positivistic research tradition that is still dominant in the universities of the country in general. The limited number of these formations and their affiliations to private universities located in the urban areas might confine interdisciplinary, critical, and ethnographic research to more a internationalized, English-speaking, and economically well-off academics and students. In other words, anthropological research still remains in the periphery of the periphery.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Anthropological practice in Turkey is to a great extent a university based scholarly activity. Turkish anthropologists are dispersed among diverse social science departments in and out of Turkey. It is a small, fragmented, and silent discipline having no or low impact in public debates, macro politics, and mass media. There is an encapsulation of Turkish anthropologists within the academic milieu. Fieldwork and ethnographic research seem to be sponsored mostly by private enterprises or by the universities with international connections. Variances in epistemological and methodological approaches are not only confined to different generations, but also to the patterns of Western and Turkish anthropology training. If one of the ways of defining anthropology is the study of the other through which one reflects on his/her own society, this reflexive approach seems to be a lonely activity in the Turkish case. On the other hand, beyond the limits of departmental boundaries, there are new openings toward more non-positivist, qualitative, critical, and reflexive social research. I do not think that it would be fair to
reduce all the above mentioned debates and developments as a peculiarity of Turkish anthropology. From a comparative perspective, there are more similarities than differences between us and them. Maybe it is time to protect our “good” authentic sides against some “bad” erosions of globalization.

NOTES

1. I will use anthropology to refer to social and cultural anthropology throughout the text.

2. In 1983, I took a fourth year elective course, a seminar on women and society, offered by Nükhet Sirman, a female anthropologist teaching in the Department of Sociology at Middle East Technical University in Ankara. After the “grand narratives” of my department of political science, it was extremely interesting to learn about social anthropology. My term paper was on the Turkish peasant women handicrafts and their symbolic meanings. When I decided to study folklore at the graduate level, I found myself in the Anthropology Department at Hacettepe University. I was accepted with two warnings; first, I should not get married and leave the field, and second, I should hold fast to folklore due to its unpopularity among the students. However, I both married and shifted to social anthropology. I did my field research among Turkish migrants residing in a multicultural district in Oslo between 1989 and 1991. At present, I am teaching in the Department of Political Science at Bilkent University and offering courses from an anthropological perspective on transnational cultures, interculturalism and Europe, among others (see Tandoğan 1999 and 2004 for related publications).

3. There are eight anthropology departments today: in Ankara, at Hacettepe and Ankara Universities; in Istanbul, at Yeditepe and Istanbul Universities; in Sivas, at Cumhuriyet University; in Hatay, at Mustafa Kemal University; and in Van, at Yuzuncu Yıl University.


5. Paul Stirling did his doctoral fieldwork in two villages, Sakaltutan and Elbasi, in Kayseri, a small city located in the southeast of Ankara, between 1949 and 1951. The book, which is based on this research, was *Turkish Village*, published in 1965. He revisited and restudied the same villages after thirty-five years had passed, together with a team of Turkish anthropologists. For his ethnographic data and archives, see <http://lucy.ukc.ac.uk.Stirling/>.


7. There are two migration research centers based in Istanbul; one at Bilgi University launched in 2002 (see <http://www.goc.bilgi.edu.tr/>), and the other at Koc University, opened this year (see <http://www.ku.edu.tr/~mirekoc/>).

REFERENCES


