

## Book Review

# Gendered Fortunes: Divination, Precarity and Affect in Postsecular Turkey

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Zeynep K. Korkman's book *Gendered Fortunes: Divination, Precarity and Affect in Postsecular Turkey* examines the proliferating fortune-telling economy of millennial Turkey with a focus on the gendered practices of commodified divination in Istanbul, where fortune telling coffee houses have mushroomed in the last two decades. As Korkman aptly chronicles in this book, Istanbul's divination economy is composed of business arrangements where fortune telling services are provided upon the purchase of coffee, in conjunction with a variety of supplementary services such as Reiki, lead-pouring sessions and life coaching, and operates in various platforms including cafés, offices, and online platforms. *Gendered Fortunes* draws on extensive ethnographic research to expose the affects, gendered sociabilities, and labours in the divination economy through which secular Muslim women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTI+) individuals navigate their precarious livelihoods, secular Muslim identities, the vicissitudes of neoliberal economy and gendered vulnerabilities. The divination publics Korkman studied are made up of mostly secular Muslim women and a minority of LGBTI+ subjects who are disadvantaged and feminised in heteropatriarchal relations of domination and subordination.

Exposing the multifarious layers of the gendered practices of divination, *Gendered Fortunes* highlights the political potentials of feminist engagements with affect, emotion, and feeling. Regarding divination service as a form of 'feeling labour', the book employs it as a feminist lens to marginalisation, precariousness and vulnerabilities in millennial Turkey.

This book engages with and contributes to different strands of feminist debates. It poses novel questions on how the coupling of capitalism and heteropatriarchy constitutes gendered lives and livelihoods and underscores the central role of affects in feminised labours under neoliberalisation. It also draws on and expands the insights of feminist scholarship on emotional and affective labours by developing the concept of 'feeling labour' as a spiritual economic endeavour for healing the vulnerabilities of post-secular neoliberal selfhood through the affective modes of divination. As such, *Gendered Fortunes* attests to how fortune telling, which seems like a seemingly insignificant practice in everyday life, can offer an original perspective to understand the ways in which precarious and anxious feminised subjects navigate the gendered vulnerabilities inherent in the logics of neoliberalism, postsecularism, and the masculine public sphere.

This book is innovative, inspiring, and noteworthy in many respects. First, it foregrounds significant attention to the post-secular, authoritarian, and political moment in millennial Turkey, where the informants engage in the divination economy as readers, entrepreneurs, and customers, while transversing broader social formations. Korkman's analysis meticulously situates the informants' engagement with the divination economy *vis-à-vis* the

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shifting terms of the affective atmosphere of millennial Turkey. She extensively notes the transformation of the political and public spheres where the AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party)) rules. Globally and domestically regarded as a model Muslim democracy in the first decade of 2000s, Turkey became increasingly authoritarian by the 2010s, stepping back from democratisation and EU membership ideals, exercising masculinist state power, and targeting feminist and queer movements and eroding gender sensitive legal frameworks.

Noting these shifting terms of the political milieu, together with the marginalised and disempowered subjects' negative feelings arising from suppression and heteropatriarchal hierarchies, *Gendered Fortunes* suggests that divination provides an alternative public space away from the overarching antagonistic political struggles where feminised subjects are more free to express their anxieties, vulnerabilities and hopes through the affective language of divination. Korkman's analysis also evaluates the novelty of divination publics in terms of the post-secular condition in contemporary Turkey where secularism is no longer hegemonic *vis-à-vis* AKP's growing authoritarian Islamist dominance. The author argues that fortune-telling publics destabilise the secular-pious binaries inherent in the composition of the public in modern Turkey in that 'they are neither exactly gender-mixed, as proposed by secularist recipes, nor are they strictly gender-segregated, per reinvented religious precepts' (p. 11). It brings to our attention that 'while coffee divinations have long served as a medium of feeling one's way through gendered vulnerabilities, they are increasingly appropriated in the service of managing a compounded neoliberal and postsecular precarity' (p. 163). Taking as its object of inquiry a seemingly unimportant practice, this research opens a window into feminised and marginalised ways of engaging with affects in a context marked by the religio-conservative gender regime, secular hegemonic decline, political authoritarianism, and neoliberal precarities.

Second, it conceptualises divination service as a labour of 'feeling' (*bissetmek*) mobilised as a way of articulating and processing 'ordinary yet deeply felt gendered desires and anxieties' (p. 10). As such, this conceptualisation provides solid ground to expose how divination services generate an enchanted, affective intersubjective space in which both the clients and the fortune tellers can explore, experience, and engage with a range of affective emotions, ranging from the anxieties of an increasingly Islamist post-secular public sphere to the neoliberal labour precarity. Korkman meticulously differentiates between the concepts of *emotional*, *affective* and *feeling labour*. She puts her research into dialogue with the feminist scholarship where the concept of emotional labour has been used to expose gendered workers' inner states and how they are incorporated into labour processes to produce desired emotional results, while the term affective labour is employed to put the stress on the commodified production of affects (p. 164-165). Expanding this scholarship by developing the concept of *feeling labour*, Korkman emphasises fortune tellers' self-reflective understanding of divination as an active process of feeling where they engage in an intersubjective process of affective attunement and emotional expression that is commodified under neoliberal precarity, but the author also argues should not be reduced to this commodification. Within this frame, she argues that 'interpersonal processes of affective attunement foster emotional incitement and identification and thus blur the very boundaries between self and other as well as between spontaneous versus manufactured feelings' (p. 165).

To explain this nuanced approach, Korkman reports intimate conversations between fortune tellers and their clients that expose the intertwined affective and emotional qualities of the divination service. One of her informants, Esra, a queer woman in her thirties, expresses how she actively regulates the affective intensities and emotional states that might emerge during the intersubjective space of a divination service: 'It's like opening a wound, and you'd better not open it unless you know how to heal it.... One of my clients told me the most beautiful thing. She told me, "Esra, you make me walk naked in the snow and not get cold"' (p. 172). In a similar vein, another informant in Korkman's study, Bayhan, states: 'I can relax people, no doubt. But it all depends on me. I could speak in a way that makes the client anxious. Their spirits would definitely not be raised were I to tell them that their past was horrible, their present sucks, and their future will only get worse!' (p. 171).

In an era where the anxieties of economic neoliberalisation, precarious labour, rising Islamism, and attacks on gender-equal democracy are surging, this scholarly focus on feeling labour is novel and inspiring in that it provides feminist scholars useful tools to grapple with the affective modalities of 'juxtapolitical publics' that can offer some relief from the antagonistic struggles of the political and public spheres. Korkman defines 'juxtapolitical publics' as publics that 'lie to the side of the political and are valued by their participants for their very distance from the formal political realm' (p. 155). Korkman's study reveals that divination spaces provide underprivileged and minoritised subjects novel socio-spatial arrangements through which they can try an alternative engagement with the public and reflect on their affective states to mitigate the gendered vulnerabilities of post-secularism, gender conservatism, neoliberalism, precarity, and feminised labour.

The book consists of three parts. In Part I 'The Religious, the Superstitious, and the Postsecular', Chapter 1 historically contextualises divination practices in Turkey in terms of their relation to rationality and secularism, which are among the founding principles of Turkish modernity. It highlights how the disavowal of superstition and fortune-telling was significant to the making of the secular from a historical perspective. As such, it underscores the significance of the production and display of mixed-gender socialising in the Turkish secular public sphere in

opposition to the gender-segregated traditional and religious publics. Chapter 2 positions secular Muslim fortune-tellers *vis-à-vis* the gendered dynamics of Turkish secularism. It reflects on their engagement with the category of the secular and describes how they navigate their secularist identities and the present post-secular public by differentiating their divination services through ‘a secularised but enchanted discourse of feeling’ that complicates the ‘the rational/superstitious, Western/Eastern, and masculine/feminine distinctions’ (p. 86). Chapter 3 chronicles fortune tellers’ complex engagements in religion and divination and the ambiguous modes of their identity narratives that lay claim to both secular and Muslim modes of belonging, and portrays the intricate ways through which they attune themselves to the postsecular condition of millennial Turkey.

In Part II ‘Femininity, Intimacy, and Publics’, Chapter 4 examines the affectivity of divination and its role in production and navigation of gendered hopes and anxieties. Korkman defines divination publics as intimate publics where feminised subjects emotional and affective labours and encounters constitute a sense of belonging to a community marked by a feminine, relational intimacy (*mahrem*) and affective epistemology. Here, she details the socio-spatial relations of gendered intimacy in modern Turkey and defines post-secular divination publics as novel arrangements that are distinct from both gender-segregated Islamicate and gender secular mixed sociabilities and foster new public intimacies between women and LGBTI+ subjects. Chapter 5 neatly situates the divination publics *vis-à-vis* the proliferation of discourses on sexuality and intimacy under the AKP rule, especially in the post-2010 period. As Islamically accented neo-conservative familialism increasingly regulated marital, reproductive, sexual intimacies through heteronormative norms, premarital and pronatalist policies as well as coercive powers directly targeting feminist and LGBTI+ bodies and activism, the disciplining of intimacies and sexualities under the processes of neoconservatisation have become overwhelming. Against this background, Korkman develops her argument that by reducing the risks associated with being intimate for gender and sexual minorities, divination publics can provide certain relief from the neoconservative regulatory discourses and coercive powers of the political public sphere and mainstream public culture.

In Part III, ‘Feeling Labor, Precarity and Entrepreneurialism’, Chapter 6 explains how fortune tellers appropriate feeling labour to manage and navigate post-secular and neoliberal precarity. Here, Korkman describes that secular Muslim fortune tellers and entrepreneurs may engage in divination work as a result of downward mobility or the motivation to become part of the booming new age entrepreneurial industry and employ the dominant therapeutic ethos of neoliberalism to manage their own and their customers’ feelings of precarity and unsettlement. Chapter 7 reflects on the deepening precarities and the gendered, post-secular, economic vulnerabilities underlying the transnationalisation and digitalisation of divination economy by portraying the growing insecurities, anxieties and self-doubts of the precarious labour force working in the newly emerging modalities of divination economy such as online fortune tellers and translators from Turkish to Arabic catering to the needs of foreign clients from Arab countries.

Overall, this book is innovative, thought-provoking, and well-written. It offers novel insights for scholars interested in feminist scholarship on gendered labour and its affective modalities in the age of neoliberalism. Moreover, it is a necessary read for those who aim to grasp the shifting terms of the affective atmosphere in the political sphere and public culture of millennial Turkey and how divination publics constitute novel public arrangements at the intersection of gender precarities, emotions, affect, neoliberalism and postsecularism.

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