

ZEYNEP K. KORKMAN. GENDERED FORTUNES: DIVINATION, PRECARITY, AND AFFECT IN POSTSECULAR TURKEY. DURHAM: DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS 2023. 276 P. ISBN: 978147809355-8

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In December 2021, I stumbled upon a café with a sign announcing a Tarot and fortune reading, as shown in the image below, while I was walking with a Turkish friend in Istanbul. My friend was a sceptic of the practice and said with a smile, 'Don't believe in fortune telling but don't stay without it either' (*Fala inanma, falsiz da kalma*). Both of us were intrigued by the sign and we decided to enter the café, order Turkish coffee, and ask for a reading of our 'fal'- the Turkish word for fortune. After drinking the coffee, I carefully followed my friend's instructions: inverted the cup upside down on the saucer, swirled it twice in a closed motion, placed my ring on its base, and waited for it to cool. When the fortune-teller arrived, he held the coffee cup and began to interpret the patterns left by the coffee grounds. Each symbol made of coffee residue seemed to convey information about events and people in my present and in the future. I listened eagerly and noticed that the *fal* narratives were both personal and cautionary, advising me to pay close attention to certain events in my life. The coffee's price was more expensive than usual because it included the cost of the fortune-telling.



Figure 1. The coffee shop sign that we visited in December 2021 in Kadıköy neighbourhood. The sign reads 'Tarot, Coffee, Cards, and Water, fortune reading'

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This memory was evoked while reading Zeynep Korkman's book, which provides a deeper understanding of the entangled labour, precarity, and affective relations experienced by both fortune tellers and their clients in the intimate publics of the divination economy in postsecular Turkey. I learned that the fortune-telling fee was covertly included in the price of coffee, as it has been illegal to charge for fortune-telling services since the early 1920s when fortune-telling was criminalised as part of Atatürk's modernisation efforts to build a secular Turkey. This criminalisation aimed to eliminate traditional, religious, and superstitious practices from the public sphere and promote more secular activities. Korkman conducted extensive ethnographic research on fortune-telling practices with 'divination publics', which consisted of secular Muslim women and LGBTQI+ people enmeshed and subjugated within the multitude of patriarchal and authoritarian power dynamics in Turkey. Korkman utilises the prism of fortune-telling and its dynamics to unpack the gendered, affective, and precarious realities that both the fortune-teller and their clients feel. Her analysis thoughtfully positions her interlocutors' interactions with the divination economy within the context of Turkey's evolving affective and precarious atmosphere. Most importantly, Korkman adopts a feminist approach to theorise how her interlocutors navigate forms of subjugation, uncertainty, and precarity through the type of labour employed within this practice.

Korkman argues that divination provides an authentic space in which feminised subjects interact freely to share their vulnerabilities and dreams over fortune-telling narratives and intersubjective experiences. In such spaces, divination practices and narratives thrive on '(hissetmek – feeling) that bridges deeply felt desires, fears, and anxieties' (10). Korkman describes this labour as a 'feeling labour', a notion that encompasses emotion and affect within the notion of 'feeling' that fortune-tellers deploy while describing their source of knowledge and interaction in the telling of 'fal' narratives and deal with the anxiety of everyday living with its gendered vulnerabilities and ambiguity. Korkman explains that fortune-tellers refer to the practice of divination as an iterative process of feeling that encompasses attunement with the client as well as diligent expression of emotions and intersubjective empathetic understanding in ways that the client feels understood and recognised (222- 223). Bayhan, the fortune-teller, and Korkman's interlocutor, describes it as 'I look into their eyes. I hold their hands. I feel their energy. It is not really about the shapes [of coffee residues]. But if I said things out of the blue, they would be scared. Coffee, tarot cards—these are just instruments' (161). Bayhan continues "I get a feeling" [*içime doğuyor*]. Something happens when I see someone. It grows stronger when I touch them. Sometimes without any instruments' (162). By coining the term 'feeling labour', Korkman emphasises the nature of the affective labour through illustrating the intimate interactions between fortune tellers and their clients, revealing the intricate connection between affective and emotional aspects of the divination practice. Korkman argues that this emotional attunement, which Beyhan describes, between the fortune teller and client blurs the boundaries between self and others, as well as between genuine and manufactured feelings (165). Korkman distinguishes between the concepts of emotional, affective, and feeling labour. She explains that feminist scholarship has utilised the concept of emotional labour to reveal gendered workers' inner emotional states and how they are integrated into draining labour processes to produce the desired emotional outcomes, while the term affective labour emphasises the commodification of affects (164-165).

Korkman unpacks the analytic of the 'postsecular' to describe the current socio-political and authoritarian environment in Turkey. Rather than focusing on the dichotomy between the religious and the secular, Korkman tends to multitudinous factors that define contemporary Turkey beyond religion, such as class dynamics, ethnic and racialised politics, the secular elite and Islamist populists, and gendered realities and inequalities. She argues that the distinction between religious and secular is not a fixed or stable concept, but rather a dynamic and contested one. She posits that people who participate in the pastime of fortune-

telling, both as customers and practitioners, identify themselves as both secular and Muslim, despite holding seemingly contradictory beliefs. Korkman argues that fortune-telling represents an occult practice in which belief and scepticism coexist and that Turkish people can readily embrace these dual positions in their daily lives. Rather than proclaiming the failure or demise of the secular era, Korkman argued that Turkey in its current postsecular era is both shaped and challenged, and that the proliferation of fortune-telling and occult-based fortune practices has influenced the process of secularisation in Turkey. Korkman traces the political changes under the rule of the AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* [Justice and Development Party]) and Turkey's increasingly Islamic authoritarian reality that affects freedom of speech with increased violations against women and LGBTQI+ movements. She draws on the international politics of the AKP and the end of efforts to gain EU membership, moving away from democratisation and EU membership aspirations and targeting feminist and queer movements while eroding gender-sensitive legal frameworks.

The book is divided into three main parts. The first part is titled 'The Religious, the Superstitious, and the Postsecular.' Korkman examines the historical background of the criminalisation of divination practices in Turkey and how they have been influenced by the emergence of the modern Turkish state and Atatürk's pursuit of rationality and secularism as the fundamental tenets of modernising Turkey. She elucidates the alterations in the public domain and social patterns in contemporary Turkey that have transformed traditionally gender-segregated spaces during the Ottoman Empire into mixed-gender spaces. Korkman's focus is on secular Muslim fortune-tellers and their relationship with the gender dynamics of Turkish secularism. She unpacks how fortune-tellers negotiate the ambiguity of their livelihoods and embody a form of labour that transcends the paradoxical categories of the religious and secular, masculine and feminine, rational and superstitious, and modern and traditional in postsecular Turkey. The second part is titled 'Femininity, Intimacy, and Publics', where she explains that divination publics are intimate communities where feminised subjects engage in emotional and affective labour, forming bonds rooted in feminine, relational intimacy. Korkman argues that public divination can alleviate some of the risks associated with being intimate for gender and sexual minorities, thereby providing relief from the coercive powers of the political public sphere and mainstream public culture. She distinguishes postsecular divination publics from gender-segregated Islamic and gender-mixed secular sociabilities manifested in the formation of public intimacies between women and LGBTQI+ subjects. She situates divination publics in relation to the proliferation of discourses on sexuality and intimacy under AKP rule, particularly in the post-2010 period when marital, reproductive, and sexual intimacies are regulated through heteronormative norms, premarital and pronatalist policies, and coercive powers targeting feminist and LGBTQI+ bodies. The third part of the book is titled 'Feeling Labour, Precarity and Entrepreneurialism', where Korkman explains how fortune tellers employ feelings of labour to connect with clients and perform their work in an atmosphere that is precarious and ambiguous. Precarity acted as a driving force to engage in entrepreneurial pursuits by managing their own clients, especially in the current transformative and digitised economies of divinatory practices such as online fortune-telling applications. Furthermore, Korkman defines precarity as a form of sensation and a constant state of feeling anxiety and uncertainty (187), which are not distributed equally between people, as they are subject to gendered and classed dynamics among others.

Korkman explains that divination publics are typically not deemed significant in feminist politics (154). Although fortune-telling cafés are not usually political spaces, they possess potential as proto-political spaces akin to gay clubs or bathhouses, which became sites of resistance in response to oppression. While not considered counterpublics, these juxtapolitical spaces can intersect with political movements, as seen during the 2014 Gezi Uprising, where fortune-telling cafés functioned as havens from police violence and locations

for political expression (155). However, their value lies in their distance from formal politics, providing a space apart from the increasingly moralising and disciplinary political sphere in Turkey, which can be hazardous for those marginalised by heteropatriarchal norms (155). Finally, Korkman's book illustrates the significance of divinatory spaces that offer marginalised and subjugated precariat an intersubjective space that allows them to connect, converse, and experiment with alternative approaches to belonging and to the public to alleviate gendered vulnerabilities in the context of modern Turkey.

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