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ENUNCIATIONS FROM THE MARGINS

A Bhabhian Analysis of Turkey’s Liminality

Shaun Anton Metcalfe

Abstract

Liminality typically refers to a period of transition; therefore, it is a process of negotiation. In international relations, liminal states tend to be buffer zones or on the margins of communities, thus circumscribed to unfixed identities, embedded in identity discourses as ‘the Other.’ Turkey has been perceived to exist as a gateway to the East and West and, consequently, has been considered a liminal state, between ideas of Europe and the Middle East, as well as on the fray of the European Union (EU). Building on Turner’s ([1969] 1974) studies of liminality in cultural anthropology and Bhabha’s ([1994] 2006) elevation of emerging/slender margin narratives in post-imperial societies, this project uses discourse analysis to examine the political rallies in April and May, 2007, that were provoked by the Turkish presidential elections. In this vaunting of the Turkish perspective, a more nuanced reading on the characteristics of liminality is pursued. Instead of focussing on security dilemmas between states, a post-colonial theoretical application of liminality finds that emerging contemporary Turkish identities are being negotiated in the contradictions of the debates between secularism and the role of Islam in the public sphere, the republican dimension of demokrasi and the challenge to the authoritarian elites’ influence, and the effect of Europeanisation in the context of cultural differences. Effectively, through using liminality as a lens to articulate difference, it is clear that identities are being shaped amongst Turks themselves and between Turkey and the EU. Negotiation in the public sphere engenders discussion on the limits of Turner’s expected aggregation of liminal states, Anderson’s ([1983] 1991) unisonance in the narrative of nation-building and Said’s ([1978] 2003) positing of Western European influence on the identity of ‘the Other.’ An examination of the debates enunciated in the public sphere presents an alternative reading to and understanding of liminality, suggesting its flexibility and possibilities in describing the complexity of contemporary Turkish national identities.
Dedication

For E. Yen ~

the South, East, West and North of me.
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