



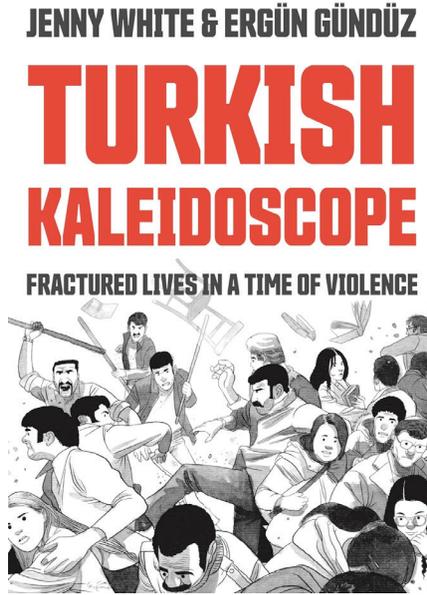
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Kitap Tanıtımı / Book Review

Jenny White. *Turkish Kaleidoscope: Fractured Lives in a Time of Violence*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2021

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Jenny White, a US cultural anthropologist who has been working on different aspects of contemporary cultures in Turkey since the 1970's, has a special place in ethnographic studies of Turkey. Currently professor emerita at Stockholm University Institute for Turkish Institute, she studied psychology at Hacettepe University and learned Turkish there. With a native proficiency working in Turkish, her publications on Turkey include several books with significant awards and several other impactful articles on Turkey. Her work include *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks* (Princeton University, 2014), *Islamist Mobilization in Turkey: A Study in Vernacular Politics* (University of Washington Press, 2002) and *Money Makes Us Relatives: Women's Labor in Urban Turkey* (University of Texas Press, 1994). She also authored a series of history-based novels focusing on nineteenth century Ottoman culture: *The Winter Thief* (W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2010), *The Abyssinian Proof* (W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2009), and *The Sultan's Seal* (W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2007). Now with through *Turkish Kaleidoscope: Fractured Lives in a Time of Violence* (2021), Jenny White reaches out to her audience with a graphic novel written by her and illustrated by Ergün Gündüz.

The book tells the story of Turkish politics over a longue durée, starting in the 1970s, when political polarization in Turkish society was paramount. It was a time when the country was facing a civil war. Four students, who are taking part in opposing sides of an ideological conflict, are placed at the center of her story. White weaves this story well into today, through following the lives of the main characters. Today the country faces not one but many and multi-faceted blocks in society – among others – religious, ethnic and economic. Jenny White tells the readers these students' connecting and separating stories, as they go through the political violence of the mentioned period.

It seems that White presents this story as a popular story through a graphic novel not as an academic one, in the strict sense of the word. Graphic novels are emergent genres that rely on very minimal text, or no text at all. But this is exactly the point about graphic novels as they do not use the usual medium of narration. The text White presents is not a text of a "classical" monograph. White's book is rich in visual elements, drawings, graffiti, speech bubbles, which are outstanding features that distinguish graphic novels from conventional ethnographic texts. Presented in mostly black and white, the book features some splotches of color for emphasis and a few full-color illustrations. With these features, White's work can be characterized to be more artistic, aesthetically pleasing and sensually stimulating. It is perhaps a challenging experiment to tell an ethnographic story, colored with author's own personal experiences and memories and the turnout is successful.

Writing such a book seems to have been inspired by Jenny White's own experiences when she was a student in Turkey in the 1970s. As the political discontent unfolded into the 1980s, Turkey witnessed a violent military coup in 1980. It was followed by referendum in 1982, and "democratic elections" in 1983, leading to a period with new consumer products and creating seeming hopes for an upward mobility instead of policing, control and violence that ruled the 1970s. The story is based on the daily lives of four main personas, who are presented as the "Rightists" – Faruk and Orhan – and "Leftists" – Nuray and Yunus. The

events mostly take place in Ankara's Hacettepe University in 1975, which was epitomized as the center of the right-wing Islamist-nationalist and left-wing revolutionary groups. These young people – and many others in their respective groups – are fighting over ideologies that separate them: they call each other “Fascists” and “Communists.” Certainly, there are more characters beyond these students, such as parents and other adults in various occupations that enrich the graphic telling of these events. Besides her own memories, Jenny White uses ethnographic material that come from the interviews she conducted in 2014. The book is interwoven with her year-long experience in Turkey and her ethnographic material, featuring Jenny White as a cultural anthropologist, novelist and as woman who had witnessed the political changes and clashes in Turkey over several decades.

White presents street violence among individuals as well as the state violence of the coup on these people. Reading through the experiences of these individuals, the readers come to a point in which they see that their children begin the story anew – similar to a kaleidoscope of historical events, turning up each time differently. White evokes the principle of this amazing gadget that generates multiple reflections through the lenses it has. But the images White presents, are not always necessarily “beautifully seen” as the Greek word originally suggests. Some images from these “fractured lives” are indeed very gray.

In one conversation Jenny White once told me that the devil is in the detail. I cannot remember well how our conversation reached to this point, but I remember that we were talking about anthropologists to ethnographic settings. White captures all details in every snap-shot of her graphic-novel: meetings, demonstrations, graffiti, posters, fights and killings—horrendous events that not only divided the youth at the time but fostered further divisions. All this detail embellishes the human relations and their lives. They are so well captured in the book that one almost watches a documentary.

This is perhaps because the of the visual elements placed at the forefront that a graphic novel accomplishes and artistic quality that it presents. These are significant features which can be difficult to achieve in a “classical” ethnographic account, which typically structures its narrative by providing a sequence and a conclusion and focusing on the systematic description of cultures. Fiction, on the other hand, employs storytelling through various perspectives and expressive methods, diverging in its approach by incorporating multiple narratives and styles. But there are ethnographies which were written in a “dialogical” mode that allow more than the author's voice whereby a “bird-eye” view can present a more holistic picture of events, sequences, and conclusions. I think that White's presentation of the story in “graphic novel”, a new, emergent format, is a result of her expertise not only in ethnographic texts but also in fiction. This is the core of White's book, which is a narrative told by her and illustrated by Ergün Gündüz. She brings ethnographic perspectives next to seemingly fictional storytelling, therefore making them more rooted in the everyday experiences of persons who lived through these events.

If the reader thinks that the book begins and ends with the 1970s, they should be cautioned that this is really not so. White ends the book by taking the reader to the 2013 Gezi Park

protests against then-prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. This is an interesting twist, a circulatory movement, or better, going back to a palimpsest which is created anew in the Turkish kaleidoscope. As one recall, the Gezi Protests started on May 28, 2013, at the very location that the May Day massacres took place on May 4, 1977: Taksim Square, in a way completing White's narrative where it started.

Our age can be characterized by "shorts" particularly in digital narration – you tube videos and Tik Toks are only exemplary. I think that such a compelling story of political polarization in Turkey that marked the 1970s is a timely fit for a graphic novel, especially for young people who are interested in Turkey. I have in mind undergraduate students in anthropology or history courses in the USA and particularly undergraduates in Turkish universities to have a grasp on the recent political and cultural history. I also think that it is an equally fascinating read for those who witnessed these horrendous moments to see things from a different perspective. Last, those who have not witnessed these times but maintained an interest in recent political history will find the book interesting.

One must extend congratulations to Jenny White for narrating such an engaging story, one that has not yet been explored by the "native" anthropologists in Turkey. Importantly, I suggest that this book deserves to be translated into Turkish, an endeavor that has not yet been undertaken. Ergün Gündüz also merits commendation for his illustrations that perfectly capture the essence of White's narrative. Last, perhaps also interesting for readers is a video trailer, which is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QKwqiu2EZXs> by the Princeton University Press in addition to a soundtrack that present the mood of the period through music: <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/2PRgRZUYYJvIYnskpsXbko?si=vyM0DK5vRqW26u8qM&nd=1>.