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Turkey's Green Screen: Modernity as Erasure and Projection

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Abstract

Turkish society lacks direct access to the thoughts and aesthetics of the past that most other societies take for granted. To be modern normally means to build on this past or to break with it. Without a known past, modernity takes on the trappings of the present. After its founding in 1923, the republic uprooted institutions and re-engineered social identities, abandoned architectural and aesthetic legacies, and (re)invented national history. This has made national identity and its material expression particularly vulnerable to reinvention under the influence of politics and the market. As a result, modernization in Turkey is increasingly defined by commercialized abstractive landscapes and objects devoid of vernacular references.

Bio

Jenny White is a social anthropologist and Professor Emerita at the Institute for Turkish Studies at Stockholm University. She is the former president of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association and former president of the American Anthropological Association Middle East Section. She is the author of seven books about Turkey, three of them academic, three fiction and one hybrid. Her scholarly books include *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks* (chosen by Foreign Affairs as one of three best books on the Middle East in 2012); *Islamist Mobilization in Turkey: A Study in Vernacular Politics* (Winner of the 2003 Douglass Prize for best book in Europeanist anthropology); and *Money Makes Us Relatives: Women's Labor in Urban Turkey*. She also has published three historical novels set in nineteenth-century Istanbul. Her most recent book, *Turkish Kaleidoscope: Fractured Lives in a Time of Violence*, is graphic fiction based on true stories.