


Queer in Translation: Sexual Politics under Neoliberal Islam. Evren Savcı (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021). Pp. 248. \$99.95 cloth, \$25.95 paper. ISBN: 9781478010319

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Evren Savcı's *Queer in Translation: Sexual Politics under Neoliberal Islam* joins the debate on the political economy within queer studies by juxtaposing neoliberalism and Islam. The author argues that viewing Islam as a lived reality can help us see the material conditions that incubate complex queer/trans political experiences and movements in Muslim-majority nation-states like Turkey. The book contributes to the scholarship that brings together critiques of geopolitics, language, morality, neoliberalism, Islam, and sexuality politics in the Middle East.

Savcı's key intervention in the book is questioning the universalization of Western-centric concepts and their conventionalization in Turkey's women's, queer, and trans politics. She starts by discussing various ethnographic cases in Turkey that have gained international attention and media coverage. She then trenchantly presents the circulation of the English-language terminology of queer theory (e.g., outness, hate crimes, chosen family) within Turkey's queer/trans political scene in relation to those cases. Savcı argues that the Western anthropological accounts about queer politics in the Middle East that look merely for ahistorical cultural differences reproduce binaries such as colonial/authentic and modern/traditional.

The book suggests that the discussion of queer politics in the Middle East would be more fruitful if it foregrounded perspectives on critical translation. Instead of the discussion being merely a linguistic exchange, it could be a semantic relationship that people build with terms and, by extension, with one another. For example, "Ahmet Yıldız is my family" is a statement that has been articulated multilingually by presumably gay men from various, mostly European, countries in a YouTube tribute video to Ahmet Yıldız, a twenty-six-year-old Kurdish gay man who was murdered in 2018 in Istanbul. This is an example of such a relationship in a collective form alluding to affective solidarity, albeit in both productive and troubling ways, as Savcı aptly argues in the first chapter.

Throughout the book, Savcı focuses on the prevalent sexuality terms rooted in Euro-American contexts to show how English-centeredness has shaped queer theory's epistemological tradition and the circulation of those terms within predominantly activist fields in Turkey. However, she is wary of not abandoning the vernacular through which alternative modalities of queer translation, relationality, and analysis are likely to emerge. For instance, the travel of the untranslatable idiom "ayol" in Turkish from queer everyday speech to the language of nationwide Gezi Park protests in 2013 highlights the development of collective vernacular, on the one hand, and limitations of the Westernized political language and expression in Turkey, on the other hand. Savcı also calls for an approach to language as a *practical* human activity. By following this call, I wonder how the cross-linguistic experiences of racially and ethnically diverse activists (i.e., Kurdish, Arab, Armenian) can intervene in the standardization of discursive, semantic, and affective itineration of queer vocabulary in the overarching national/hegemonic Turkish language without falling into the traps of nativism and multiculturalism of which Savcı is deeply critical.

Savcı convincingly attends to racialized and spatialized registers embedded in translation and the afterlife of translation. For instance, she argues that a British newspaper's positioning of Ahmet's murder as an honor killing worked to *nationally* reify Turkey's "eastern" Kurdish regions as feudal and traditional. Ahmet's internationally known story was a mechanism to repeat the story of the persecution of gay people in "backward" Muslim countries



in juxtaposition to gay liberation in the “modern and progressive” metropole/West. Savcı argues that these binary narrations, fed by the complicity of universality-particularity, reduce domestic violence to geographies imagined as Muslim and uphold Western family romance and the myth of the West as a location of stranger danger (p. 25). Contrary to its pro-West and pro-globalization endeavors, a clear example of this perspective is the AKP’s recent harsh critique of internationally funded queer organizations. The ruling party in Turkey, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP: Justice and Development Party), reproduced this portrayal of the “West” as a unified category and discursive threshold at which it mobilizes the fear of alleged national annihilation and “moral collapse” against sexual politics in Turkey.

In the global (and mostly colonial) imagination, Turkey has long occupied an “exceptional” and relatively progressive geopolitical status for LGBTQI+ communities between the Middle East and Europe because of its once much-touted encounter with Western secularism and the presence of moderate Sunni Islamic governance. Unpacking such geopolitically nuanced, homonationalist “queer-friendly” attributions, Savcı does not believe that “colonial mimicry or the frameworks of Islamophobia or homonationalism” are sufficient to understand the changing dynamics of the political economy, governance, and sexual politics in Turkey (p. 24). As Savcı aptly summarizes, Turkey’s AKP went from supporting a growing queer/trans movement between 2008 and 2015 to attacking participants at the 2015 pride celebration and banning pride marches with harsh interventions, police violence, and detentions in subsequent years (pp. 20–21). Even though Savcı briefly acknowledges the dynamics of so-called moderate Islam as a US geopolitical project, she is mainly concerned with moving away from sexual subjectivities as a marker of “progressive” modernity. These subjectivities have become common in homonationalist discourses and orientalist epistememes that situate Islam as either too radical or as the “victimized cultural other” of Western modernity.


For Savcı, the alternative way to understand the escalating securitization, surveillance, and conservatism of the AKP is to look at the regime of morality that emerges from the marriage between neoliberalism and Islam in Turkey. Savcı argues that a visible characteristic of this moral politics in the neoliberal Islamist nation-state is the expansion of marginalization to differently positioned, economically precarious bodies and lives, including Turkey’s queer/trans communities. This viewpoint enables Savcı to discuss the “queering” conditions of contemporary Turkey beyond nonnormative sexualities or genders. For instance, Savcı’s engagement with morality politics as an alternative conception of theorizing the Gezi Park uprisings invites the reader to rethink commonalities that hold and bind seemingly disparate groups (e.g., religious hijabi women, soccer fans, anti-capitalist Muslim youth, queers).

Savcı’s reading of social solidarities that reject definitions of morality and life set by the neoliberal capitalist Islamist state is encouraging (p. 139). Yet, what if commonality and common futurity as sociopolitical and temporalizing queer figures are further complicated by attending more explicitly to the registers of ethnoreligious politicization and non-Sunni Islamic lifeworld in Turkey? For instance, how does one explain that most of the youth killed during the Gezi Park protests were Alevi minoritarian and that a supposedly manipulative report released by the Turkish police claimed that 78 percent of those taken custody in the park were Alevi (pp. 138, 201)? This is not to suggest that we should add an “identity” layer to Savcı’s account with an empirical selectivity. Nor is it an attempt to portray Gezi as an Alevi-only uprising or to focus on the numbers of dead and injured (p. 138). Instead, my concern is simply examining the racialized political economy of ethnic surveillance, violence, death, hope, and life in Turkey. That is, it is imperative to consider the “uneven histories of dispossession” of those who come to become queer commons during Gezi (p. 133). Yet we must also consider those whose futures have already been dislocated, suspended, and/or denied in the production of the Turkish-Islam synthesis that escalated during the 1990s (p. 84) and is ongoing in various ways.

As these instances illustrate, Savcı's valuable book offers provocative analytical and methodological discussions for future research on sexual and racial politics, queerness, political economy, and Islam in Turkey, the Middle East, and beyond.

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The Last Muslim Intellectual: The Life and Legacy of Jalal Al-e Ahmad. Hamid Dabashi (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021). Pp. 344. \$110.00 hardcover, \$29.95 paper. ISBN: 9781474479288

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The 1960s and 1970s saw the emergence of a new generation of radical public intellectuals in Iran representing diverse ideological persuasions and giving expression to an array of anti-status quo sentiments. Although dissidents such as Bijan Jazani, Ali Shariati, and Jalal Al-e Ahmad were no longer alive in 1979 when a popular revolutionary uprising toppled the Pahlavi monarchy, their legacies have been discussed by Iran scholars almost exclusively in relation to the causes and consequences of the revolutionary movement. By now, it has become nearly unimaginable to consider Jazani's copious body of work beyond his theory of armed struggle, or to think of Shariati in terms other than the ideologue of an ostensibly Islamic revolution, or to write about Al-e Ahmad without linking his seminal 1962 essay, *Gharbzadegi*, to the postrevolutionary state's Islamization initiatives. But are there no alternative ways of reading these thinkers? Ways that consider the entirety of their intellectual output, the various influences and textures that shaped their thinking, and their continued relevance for our present moment? Hamid Dabashi's *The Last Muslim Intellectual: The Life and Legacy of Jalal Al-e Ahmad* challenges us to think about Al-e Ahmad's significance beyond the 1979 revolution and the postrevolutionary Islamist takeover.

While Iran's postrevolutionary rulers have often claimed Al-e Ahmad as one of their own, Dabashi rejects the idea that Al-e Ahmad's thought is cut from the same cloth as the fanatical Islamism of the Islamic Republic. His book aims to set the record straight by freeing Al-e Ahmad's legacy from abuse at the hands not only of the Islamic Republic but also of the ideological secularists who blame Al-e Ahmad for the sins of the Islamist state. A masterful homage to Al-e Ahmad's own fierce polemical style, Dabashi's indictment of those who have systematically and consistently distorted Al-e Ahmad's legacy makes for a captivating read. Against the grain of a reading of Al-e Ahmad as an anti-modern and anti-Western champion of Islamic nativism, *The Last Muslim Intellectual* sets out to de-nativize Al-e Ahmad by rediscovering him as a cosmopolitan Muslim intellectual who was in active conversation with all the non-Islamic elements that animated the Iranian society of his time.

For all of its harsh polemic against Al-e Ahmad's Islamist admirers and secularist detractors, *The Last Muslim Intellectual* is also a corrective to its author's 1992 book, *Theology of Discontent*. There, in the very first chapter, Dabashi discussed Al-e Ahmad as a precursor of an Islamic ideology that foregrounded the rise of the Islamic Republic. Nearly three decades later, Dabashi permits that his initial reading of Al-e Ahmad may have been colored by a total fixation on the immediate revolutionary context and the traumas unleashed by the Islamist takeover. The passage of time seems also to have modified Dabashi's assessment of the nature of the revolution. Whereas *Theology of Discontent* was billed as a study on the