

Candan Turkkan: *Feeding Istanbul: The political economy of urban provisioning*

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Feeding Istanbul provides a succinctly theorised account of the food provisioning of Turkey's most populous city over the past five hundred years. Whilst she is careful about generalising her analysis, many of the points extended by Turkkan can be read as critiques of the contemporary dominant global food system. Critiques of this kind have proliferated over the past few decades. What distinguishes Turkkan's analysis from many others' is that she refuses to allow her theorising on food provisioning to be separated from the changing political and economic organisation of Istanbul; in taking a *longue duree* approach, she is able to highlight the historical developments that have shaped Istanbul's current food provisioning systems. This allows her to convincingly argue that the organisation of food production, distribution, and consumption is a central material component of socio-political relations and thus is, and has been, a critical site for the cultivation of power.

Turkkan periodises her account using three food regimes: an *urban food provisioning* regime, a *codependent provisioning* regime, and an *urban food supply chain* regime. The first, situated in the Istanbul that was the seat of the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, was characterised by a highly centralised system of planned provisioning, regulated by a complex network of civil servants and guilds, centred on the goal of ensuring sufficient staple foods reached the subjects of Istanbul. Turkkan argues that this system constituted a moral economy in which the role of the Sultan was to maintain the consent of the citizens he governed by managing their individual bodily vulnerabilities to hunger, in turn managing the vulnerability of the *body politic* as a whole, and keeping his own body safe from violent revolt. In short, in the *urban food provisioning* regime, the bodily vulnerabilities of the Sultan, his subjects, and the political community were entangled.

The following chapters describe the latter two food regimes, where the relationship described above was unpicked and rewoven. Turkkan narrativizes the second, *codependent provisioning* regime as a transitory one, where liberalising and globalising trends within the declining Ottoman Empire of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were contested and negotiated. She identifies a couple of key shifts in the nature of the relations between the central authority and its subjects in this period. Firstly, whilst there were periods where the central authority intervened in the provisioning of food, the nature of government intervention in was changed. Rather than the direct and sometimes brutal punishments used on corrupt merchants by the Sultan, the Turkish central authority came to increasingly rely upon measures like taxes and subsidies that indirectly guided private actors. For Turkkan, this change in governance methods is symbolic of a shift in the relationship between central authority and its subjects; where previously the Sultan's legitimacy had rested upon the successful provisioning of his subjects, the legitimacy of the central authority instead was coming to rest upon the protection of the private property rights of a national bourgeoisie who profited from the provisioning of food.

Secondly, Turkkan argues that it was during this period that the central authority learned to use access to food as a method for governing and disciplining its subjects. As the state became less responsible for ensuring individuals' access to food, hunger became an issue in which the state was responsible for providing an aggregate supply of staples, and individuals were responsible for ensuring they could access this supply through the market. These conditions enabled the state to use its control over market access to discipline groups that opposed it, framing those excluded as enemies. In an elegant synthesis of Marxian and Foucauldian theory, Turkkan thus argues that the Turkish central authority learned to practice

a form of “government through hunger” (p. 119); weaponizing the means of social reproduction to discipline citizens; using *necroeconomics* to serve the practice of *necropolitics*.

In the third and most recent *urban food supply chain* regime, these emerging subject-state relations were crystallised following the implementation of a structural adjustment programme in 1980. It is this section of the book that could have most fruitfully produced some more generalised analysis; the series of events Turkkan describes – economic crisis in the 1970s, a military coup, and IMF-backed liberalisation – are characteristic features of the enforced neoliberalisation of states in the Global South in this period. Indeed, the political economic effects – consolidated supply chains; increased monopolisation; the suppression of wages for workers and prices for primary producers; and inflationary price increases for consumers – are characteristics seen in many other neoliberal states. However, within the Turkish context, her characterisation of the third regime is succinct and neatly contrasts with the first: liberalised where the first was planned; characterised by chronic but localised hunger where the first experienced acute episodes of hunger *en masse*; legitimised by its ability to maintain the conditions for bourgeois accumulation where the first was built upon provisioning.

In the final sections, reflecting on some of her more recent ethnographic work on alternative food movements in Istanbul, Turkkan is able to use the historical work she has done to provide a powerful analysis of the food politics of the present. She argues that many of the groups pushing for food systems change in Istanbul focus their critiques upon the governance of the state, rather than on the political economic relations within which food is provisioned, and thus fail to challenge the root causes of food injustices. In response, Turkkan calls for an alternative political consciousness centred around the rights of all, human and nonhuman, to meet their bodily needs. This lays the ideological grounds for the recentring of the means of subsistence as a right and a space for organising against capitalism, in the interest of removing the ability of the sovereign to weaponise necroeconomics. Avoiding the trap of ending on an empty appeal to policymakers, *Feeding Istanbul* challenges those writing, researching, and organising for more just food systems to historicise their understandings of the relationship between economic and state power, and to shift their imaginaries and strategies of resistance appropriately.