

even in the history of the Kurdish emirates and within the narrative of the contemporary Kurdish movement regarding historical Kurdish autonomy. The author writes, “the history of the Palu begs is not one of heroic resistance but of a noble family who justified their fiscal, military, and administrative privileges by referring to the imperial state’s recognition” (p. 18).

Finally, the author excavates the interconnected histories of Kurds and Armenians in the space of Palu, which she notes is of great import in both Armenian and Kurdish collective memory – for Armenians, it is the birthplace of Meshrob Mashtots, who created the Armenian alphabet in the sixth century, and for Kurds, it is the birthplace of Shaikh Said, who led a rebellion against the nascent Turkish Republic in 1925. The author carefully deconstructs the common trope of Kurds and Armenians as living separate from one another and interacting only in exceptional spaces of violence and genocide. Rather, the author illustrates the everyday interactions between Kurds and Armenians, which were characterized by both competition and cooperation. The book outlines, for instance, how in some cases Armenians supported the Kurdish begs in their conflicts with the Ottoman state; how Armenian sarrafs lent money to Kurdish begs in support of the begs’ economic projects; and how, in subsequent years, wealthy Armenians tried to buy the lands of the begs that had been confiscated by the state. The author’s careful reconstruction of these intertwined histories contradicts common narratives that read ethnocentric divides back anachronistically into the past.

The Kurdish Nobility in the Ottoman Empire provides both a granular history of a single Ottoman Kurdish noble family as well as an overarching view of Ottoman Kurdistan during a period of monumental transformation in the political, social, and economic landscape. The book is based on extensive archival research – including Ottoman, British, and American archival sources along with interviews that the author conducted with the descendants of the Palu begs. The book is written in beautiful and accessible prose, and will be of interest to not only scholars, but also students of all levels and the interested public. It represents a significant contribution to Kurdish, Armenian, Turkish, Ottoman, European, and Middle East history, and provides an important foundation for future studies of the hereditary nobility in Ottoman Kurdistan.

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Claudia Liebelt, *Istanbul Appearances: Beauty and the Making of Middle-Class Femininities in Urban Turkey*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2023, xiii + 321 pages. doi:[10.1017/npt.2023.37](https://doi.org/10.1017/npt.2023.37)

What is the political relevance of beauty? How can we locate the debate on feminine appearance, sexuality, and morality in a context of rising conservatism and authoritarianism in Turkey? How do we relate the exponential growth of Istanbul’s beauty industry to this context? What do the efforts of beautification and self-fashioning tell

us about the negotiations of belonging to İstanbul's urban middle class? What do contested norms of "respectable femininity" show us about cultural hierarchies and urban/non-urban and Islamic/secular distinctions in contemporary Turkey?

These are among the intriguing questions that Claudia Liebelt's book *Istanbul Appearances: Beauty and the Making of Middle-Class Femininities in Urban Turkey* addresses through an exhaustive ethnographic study on the market of beauty in İstanbul, which has been growing remarkably in the context of the global beauty "boom." Previous decades have witnessed the publication of a plethora of studies that explore a "battle" over women's bodies and appearances in Turkey against the background of fervent debates on modernization, Islamization, urbanization, and in the framework of social and political distinctions, particularly an Islamic/secular distinction. Liebelt's book revisits this debate in the context of post-2011 Turkey, that is, an increasingly authoritarian political landscape, and an increasingly conservative gender climate immersed in neoliberal discourses on women and femininity. While doing that, the author constantly explores the broader tension between the conceptions of "beautification as self-discipline and self-surveillance" in a neoliberal, heteronormative, patriarchal setting versus "beautification as an expression of women's desires and subjectivities."

The book relies mainly on a multi-sited ethnography in İstanbul between 2011 and 2014, in districts that are widely claimed to be examples of secular and conservative neighborhoods. The author takes readers into the world of beautification and self-fashioning, introducing them to various sites ranging from clinics of plastic surgeons to beauty salons, hairdressers, and tattoo studios. The book is permeated with rich ethnographic insights, compelling in-depth descriptions, captivating narratives derived from participant observation, and a total of 110 ethnographic guideline interviews with the providers, consumers, and entrepreneurs of beauty services. The data is supplemented with media analysis and questionnaires distributed to the visitors of a beauty fair and students of makeup training courses in İstanbul.

This is a voluminous book, with seven chapters, excluding the introduction and the conclusion. Chapter 1 is about İstanbul's emergence as a center of the global beauty market and a destination of cosmetic plastic surgery tourism. The author frames the growth of this market as a part of the city's increasingly neoliberal landscape. Chapter 2 looks into the intricacies of beauty service work from the perspective of workers, and particularly focuses on the emotional labor they put in, as well as the changing social implications of such work from a lower-status, "less respectable" form of employment to a viable career option for women. Chapter 3 focuses on the contested meanings of beauty for urban women of different generations and social positionings. The chapter discusses how conservative service providers frame feminine beauty as cleanliness and self-discipline that a "proper" woman should pursue, not least to keep alive the sexuality in heterosexual marriage. Chapter 4 is about the medicalization of aging in relation to the growth of the beauty industry. The chapter delineates how aging is redefined as a medical "risk" that postmenopausal women are expected to manage and fight through self-surveillance and esthetic "upgrades." Chapter 5 contributes to the debate on the standardization of bodily features through plastic surgery, with a focus on nose and breast reduction surgeries in Turkey. The author convincingly argues that both kinds of surgeries – problematically labeled as "ethnic plastic surgery" by medical professionals – are related to the effort to attain urban, middle-class looks, which some interlocutors refer to as a "normal" appearance.

Chapter 6, “Becoming *Prezentabl*” is about gendered norms of appearance in the lives of female workers both in white-collar jobs and service-sector jobs. The word “*prezentabl*” in the chapter’s title alludes to a frequently expressed requirement in job adverts in Turkey, and it connotes a well-groomed appearance. The chapter argues that cultivating and presenting a professional identity as a “working woman” are attached to requirements of maintaining a *prezentabl* appearance. Drawing on the interlocutors’ narratives, the author demonstrates the tension between beauty work as a burden and as a way of gaining self-confidence in the competitive world of work. Last, but not the least, Chapter 7 delves into the debate on the Islamic/secular tension over women’s bodies playing out in the realm of beauty and beautification practices, and provides insight into the battle over changing norms of respectable middle-class femininity in the context of 2010s Turkey.

Within some of these chapters, there are also sections that shine separately and call for a special discussion. In Chapter 3, the section on “bridal beauty” delineates the intensive beautification process that women go through while preparing for their wedding. Liebelt shows us how the process of “being made into a bride” (p. 140) is symbolically charged with patriarchal meanings attached to women’s sexuality in marriage, and how some women experience a disturbing loss of control at beauty salons on the day of their wedding. In Chapter 7, a section on tattoo studios frames the surging interest in tattoos in Turkey as self-identified secular women’s “cultural bodily messages” (p. 263) of resistance against the grain of Turkey’s increasingly pro-Islamic and conservative gender climate. This section is remarkable as it vibrantly addresses the question of how self-fashioning of the body can figure as a subversive expression of subjectivity.


As the brief summary above shows, this is an ambitious book in terms of addressing several debates and covering several urban sites of self-fashioning in İstanbul. It is hard to overemphasize the meticulousness of the research and the depth and thickness of the ethnographic details and descriptions. The author’s self-reflexive accounts about her own positionality in the field as an “outsider” (not just because of nationality but also as she narrates herself as a less enthusiastic consumer of beauty services), and how she developed rapport with her interlocutors, add a layer of depth to the study.

Each chapter in the book stands on its own, leading the reader towards various debates on the intricacies of women’s beautification efforts, of the beauty market, of the location of beauty in a neoliberal labor market, etc. It is a challenge to maintain a coherent structure amidst such rich data that comes out of long ethnographic research. The book, with its several stories, narratives, as fascinating as these may be, sometimes loses track of the overarching arguments and questions that it promises to focus on. Chapter 1 entitled “Istanbul, the Beautifying City” is a case in point. This chapter sets out to elaborate on one of the central issues of the book: the relation between the development of Turkey’s beauty industry and neoliberal transformation processes that took place during the Justice and Development Party (AKP) era, particularly urban gentrification. Even though the author mentions the issue, she does not elaborate much on the relation between neoliberal gentrification, sharpening social inequalities in the urban space, and how the beauty market boom is located *vis-a-vis* such inequalities. The section within this chapter that explains in meticulous detail the media hype over the plastic surgeries of Turkey’s celebrities

is very interesting, but seems somewhat out of place as it does not quite connect to the central questions of the chapter.

Another weakness in the book concerns the limited focus on the experiences and viewpoints of Islamic and conservative consumers of beauty services. This problem is particularly visible in Chapter 7. While exploring pious self-fashioning, the author does not resort to narratives from Islamic and conservative clients of beauty services, but instead puts a large focus on the narratives of a male religious scholar, Nureddin Yıldız, and a family counselor, Sibel Üresin, notorious for the anti-feminist statements she makes in popular television shows and her support for legalizing polygamy. We learn at length about Üresin and Yıldız's ideas and concerns about what the limits of self-fashioning "should be" for Muslim women. The author also discusses the beauty practices and preferences of conservative women through a young woman who works at a beauty salon owned by her mother in Fatih. However, we do not hear the voices of clients themselves, and keep wondering how they experience and narrate their own self-fashioning practices.

Notwithstanding these shortcomings, *Istanbul Appearances* is a valuable and timely contribution to the literature on the global beauty industry. The book is also essential reading for those working on cultural politics of gender in Turkey. In addition, students and scholars interested in the ethnographic method will find in Liebelt's book a captivating, excellent example of fieldwork, diligently conducted and compellingly described.

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Sertaç Sehliskoğlu, *Working Out Desire: Women, Sport, and Self-Making in Istanbul*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2021, xvii + 295 pages.
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Sehliskoğlu's book is an ethnographic study that deals with women and women's subjectivities as they go after their "passion for sport" (*spor merakı*) in İstanbul, Turkey. Sehliskoğlu's subjects are regular women: middle-aged, older, or young, housewives and working women, some religious, some not, traversing a whole range of circumstances and experiences in İstanbul. What brings them together is their dedicated and passionate engagement in sporting activities in various spaces. Using women's experiences to explore a challenging concept – desire, but also using desire as a lens to understand women's experiences and subjectivities, Sehliskoğlu focuses primarily on spaces that lie beyond the confines of both family and work, such as women-only gyms and outdoor gyms in parks. Women, as desiring, imagining agents, come together to exercise and socialize in these spaces, simultaneously defining and re-creating their subjectivities, while negotiating, maneuvering, and dealing with existing discourses, norms, and practices of gender. It is their desire that, according to