

Kuryel, Aylin, University of Amsterdam, Netherlands

Bio-Images and National Identity: Nationalist Tattoos in Turkey

Creating a “visual community” is crucial in the formation of a national community and a national identity. In Turkey, which is a rapidly changing context where the influence of globalization is increasing and religious and secular discourses continue clashing, visual communities acquire a particularly important and symbolic role in the (de)construction of national identity. Here, I am looking at the recent (after 2000) phenomenon of people branding themselves with nationalist tattoos, in order to explore the intimate relationship between nationalism and imagery. Tattoos are a good example of the close links that people and images establish in the context of nationalism. I will look at the tattoos of national symbols as examples of what I call “bio-images”: images that become part of one’s body or appearance and start determining the way in which one thinks and acts. Looking at how people give images life and how images turn people into political/national subjects will shed light on the intricate dynamics of national identity construction, as well as the role of imagery in this construction.