



## Heritage, Aesthetics and Belonging Gender in Turkish Neo-Ottomanism



21-22 November 2019

at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul

Organisers: Catharina Raudvere, Copenhagen, and Petek Onur, Ankara  
Funded by the Many Roads in Modernity, University of Copenhagen, and the Carlsberg Foundation

Thursday, November 21

12:30 lunch

13:30 Catharina Raudvere and Petek Onur: Welcome

**Panel 1**

Chair Petek Onur

13:45 Catharina Raudvere *Neo-Ottomanism - Ideology, Mobilization and History Cultures. Some Initial Remarks*  
Discussant Kerem Öktem

14:15 Courtney Dorroll *Memory and Forgetting in Neo-Ottomanism. The Case of the Ulucanlar Prison Museum*  
Discussant Yeşim Arat

15:00 Coffee Break

**Panel 2**

Chair Yeşim Arat

15:30 Hande Eslen-Ziya *De-Europeanisation, Neo-Ottomanism and New Turkey. Leading to all New Grounds for Patriarchy within Academia*  
Discussant Ayşe Saktanber

16:15 Murat Ergin, Yağmur Karakaya *Neo-Ottomanism and Popular Cultural Representations of Masculinity*  
Discussant Ayşe Öncü

17:00 Summing- up the day

19:00 Dinner

Friday, November 22

9:45 Coffee

**Panel III**

Chair Ayşe Saktanber

10:15 Petek Onur *The New Ottoman Henna Nights and Women in Palace Nostalgia*

Discussant Ayşe Öncü

11.00 Torsten Janson *Sensing the Prophet. Commemoration and Religious Affect in Turkish Publics*

Discussant Yeşim Arat

12.15 Lunch

**Panel IV**

Chair Catharina Raudvere

14:00 Özgür Kaymak *Gendering Ethno-Religious Boundaries. Mixed Marriage Patterns of Jewish, Rum Orthodox and Armenian Communities of Istanbul*

Discussant Ayşe Öncü

14:45 Nazan Maksudyan *Centennial of the First World War in Turkey and Neo-Ottomanist Themes*

Discussant Kerem Öktem

15:30 Coffee Break

16:00 **Round-table discussion**

Chair Catharina Raudvere

Ayşe Öncü, Ayşe Saktanber, Kerem Öktem, Yeşim Arat

16:45 Guidelines, deadlines, etc. for the publication

19:00 Dinner

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Catharina Raudvere

*Neo-Ottomanism - Ideology, Mobilization and History Cultures. Some Initial Remarks*

This workshop has been organized with the intention to bring together scholars with various approaches to the role of neo-Ottomanism in Turkey in long-term and contemporary perspectives. The impact of neo-Ottomanism on current politics is evident as is the amalgamation between religion and politics.

The special emphasis on gender and aesthetics in the title of the workshop is an invitation to broad discussions about the attraction of the neo-Ottoman model(s) and what it provides its adherents with in terms of identity and belonging, historical narratives and political visions for the future. What at first seem to only be narrow and inflexible roles for both women and men, turn out to also have the potential in some Islamist circles to point to arenas for engagement, active agency and even playfulness. The presentation will raise some questions that hopefully can serve as a platform for the further discussions during the workshop. With what analytical concepts can the agents transmitting the imagery of Ottoman ideals in popular culture and media be identified? What are the means for attracting new readers and viewers (consumers at large), and where (and by whom) are the limits drawn for the definition of Ottoman ideals? How to analytically handle the span between populism and intellectual interests?

As a closing section of this introductory presentation, I would also like to address the issue of neo-Ottomanism in a comparative perspective in order to underline it as part of a global phenomenon where quests for authenticity and excluding belongings have profound national and transnational political consequences.

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*Memory and Forgetting in Neo-Ottomanism. The Case of the Ulucanlar Prison Museum*

In my paper I analyze the Ulucanlar Prison museum from the lens of memory studies. This case study traces historical shifts in Turkish identity from the construction of Ulucanlar Prison by the Kemalist nationalist in 1925 to the prison's present-day form as a Neo-Ottoman curated museum, focusing on changes in identity and representation that occurred when this institution was transferred from a prison to a museum. Using the example of Ulucanlar, I argue that the identity of the prison is a place to actively forget, while the museum is an institution for publicly displaying certain types of privileged memories. In this case, this shift followed the Turkish regime's change from a secular to a religious ideological identity. I will also work to show how Neo-Ottoman voices of everyday inhabitants and former inmates affected the space where the Ulucanlar prison currently stands. The changes in memory politics in Turkey will therefore be analyzed through the case study of the Ulucanlar Prison museum.

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*Neo-Ottomanism and Popular Cultural Representations of Masculinity*

The recent imagery of the Ottoman imperial past in contemporary Turkey contain two trajectories. The first one is the state-driven neo-Ottomanism, which attempts to revive the past in a number of government-controlled domains, including foreign policy, education, and the design of the urban fabric. The second trajectory has to do with representation of neo-Ottomanism in popular culture, which we call “Ottomania”. The commercialized representation of the imperial past in popular culture has been largely irreverent and drew criticism for representing the past “falsely”. While the first trajectory tries to monopolize historical truth in a state-controlled narrative of the past, the second trajectory present a stylized and eclectic past in search of a popularized pleasure. In this presentation, we argue that the last decade witnessed the penetration of state-sponsored neo-Ottomanism into popular culture. Carrying the official narrative into popular formats, one of the most important transformations took place through the role of gendered representations. In an explicit attempt to counter the irreverent pleasures of Ottomania, a new generation of popular cultural products in line with state-sponsored neo-Ottomanism revolved around representations of a sober masculinity that were intended to correct the “false” history of the previous period and limit the options available to popular cultural Ottomania. This is no less than rewriting of an history already rewritten several times.

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*De-Europeanisation, Neo-Ottomanism and New Turkey. Leading to all New Grounds for Patriarchy within Academia*

De-Europeanisation is defined as the weakening of the EU influence on political system. But for the purpose of this paper it is more precisely defined as the weakening of gender equality discourses in domestic settings and in national public debates. It refers to the intentional loss of enthusiasm in Europeanizing the national legislation but also the intentional de-construction of the already Europeanized laws and policies as well as rules and regulations (Aybars, Copeland and Tsarouhas 2018). In the context of Turkey, this demise of EU-membership from the political agenda accompanied after AKP victory in 2011 general elections with severe backlash on gender policies. The changing Europeanisation dynamics are - referred as “democracy decline” or a “new transition” by political scientists like Plattner (2015) and Schmitter (2015). In Turkey on the other hand, such “new transition” has been indicated by the AKP itself as the New Turkey.

Under the New Turkey “the social and political order under the party’s rule maintained by a new set of norms and values” (Korkut and Eslen-Ziya 2016: 13) creating an alternative narrative on the conceptions of gender equality and what it means to be woman and man. These counter narratives are what Korkut and Eslen-Ziya (2017, 2016 and 2011) refers as discursive governance. Neo-Ottomanism, according to Yavuz (1998) bears in itself the hope to “construct a new Turkey where loyalty is determined not by any exclusivist form of racial and linguistic characteristics but rather by a shared Ottoman historical experience and a broad and diffuse attachment to Islam” (Yavuz 1998: 24). This is evident in the discursive governance of the AKP government where they actively use media and public presence to create an alternative narrative on the conceptions of gender equality. In line with this assumption the main interest in this paper is to understand the newly emerging conservative so called academic (scientific) discourses, the gendered public normative order of AKP government under the New Turkey. For this I will study articles published in **KADEM Kadın Araştırmaları Dergisi** (Journal of Women's Studies). **KADEM Journal of Women's Studies** is the official, academic periodical of the Women and Democracy Association (KADEM). It is a peer-reviewed academic journal that publishes research on gender and women's studies. The assumption here is that with neo-Ottomanism ideologies introduced under the New Turkey has created alternative anti-science discourses within academia, leading the Turkish Ministry of Education to cancelling gender equality programs for instance (2019).

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*Sensing the Prophet. Commemoration and religious affect in Turkish publics*

Scholarly research has increasingly engaged with the multifarious aspects of ‘religious politics’ in Turkey and the significance of ‘neo-Ottomania’ in nationalist discourse, cultural production and retail. Less work has been devoted to exploring the effects of such innovative orchestrations of religious symbolism for the manifestation of the sacred, and how this relates to theological traditions of ritual and representation. Attempting to contribute to such perspectives, this paper approaches the broadening urban-religious publics in Turkey through the perspective of current memory-cultural production and informal pedagogics, in the shape of museums and educational events organized in public space.

Specifically, the paper explores two interrelated yet different modi of commemoration of the Prophet Mohammed, exploring their institutional/pedagogical as well as rhetoric/symbolic staging: (1) the curious case of the rise, success and fall of ‘Holy Birth Week’, the increasingly public, official and Republican celebration of traditional Mevlid Kandili, commemorating the birth of the Prophet; and (2) the increasing significance, popularity and public visibility of the Ottoman artform of Hilye-i Şerif, the calligraphic ‘portrait’ representing the features of the Prophet, the importance of which recently was reaffirmed with the 2016 establishment of the Hilye-i Şerif ve Tesbih Muzesi.

Apart from exploring the institutional organization of these expressions of state initiated religious-commemorative culture in public space, the paper will devote particular attention to the affective aspect of representation. How are audiences invited to sense the Prophet, through the appeal to bodily, emotive and gendered states and virtues? How does the appeal to moral, pious and political virtue co-occur with the imagination of the persona of the Prophet (such as bodily features, composure, fragrance)? Again, how is this symbolically rendered, metaphorized and pedagogically staged (in forms/tropes such as the Arabic calligraphic sign; the Rose; the Prophetic Cloak/Cosmos; the Planet Earth; the Humankind)? And finally, how are such bodily-cum-symbolic representations woven into a broader texture of current Turkish-Islamic body politics, gendered/gendering publics and affective-historiographic appeal?

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*Gendering Ethno-Religious Boundaries. Mixed Marriage Patterns of Jewish, Rum Orthodox and Armenian Communities of Istanbul*

In today's world geography, where borders are blurred and transnational migration has become commonplace, there is frequent emphasis in the literature that romantic relationships and marriages between individuals belonging to different racial, ethnic and religious groups have increased in the present and recent past. Romantic relationships provides a key test case for boundary crossings because they brought into sharp relief assumptions not only about community and assimilation, but also about the sanctity of the intimate sphere of love and family. Despite the growing interest in this issue, there is no agreed-upon scholarly definition of mixedness. In this study we define mixed marriage as a marriage or union between individuals who belong to specific groups –such as race, ethnicity, religion, or some combination of these—that are constructed, depending on the time, the place, and the context, as “different” and socially “distant.”

This study –where the majority of population consisting of Muslims in Turkey– focuses on the mixed marriages between individuals from Rum Orthodox, Jewish and Armenian communities with Muslims, who are legally regarded as ethnic-religious minorities and clustered in the urban geography of Istanbul with the ever-decreasing population. There have been little attention paid into the private sphere dynamics and practices of non-Muslims of Turkey. This research will try to understand the identity construction of Rum, Jewish and Armenian communities in the private sphere within the context of mixed marriages. In this study the following questions will try to be analyzed: What are the perspectives of non-Muslim individuals, community leaders and religious people for mixed marriages? What are the strategies and struggle methods adopted by the mixed couples against the resistance and barriers developed by their families, their social communities and religious authorities (i.e. conversion)? Do mixed marriages between non-Muslims and Muslims pose a threat to assimilation or do they open the door to multiculturalism, pluralism and hybrid family practices? Furthermore, gender roles in non-Muslim families, gendered division of labor, differences in parents' approach to girls and boys in mixed marriages, the gendered structure of the ethno-religious boundaries drawn between the minorities and the wider society are also problematized. We will benefit from 60 in-depth interviews conducted between 2018-2019 with the members of Rum Orthodox, Jewish and Armenian communities from different social class, age and gender, who are residing in Istanbul. The data collected through this fieldwork will be presented in the light of the debate in the family&marriage, gender and minority literature.

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*The New Ottoman Henna Nights and Women in Palace Nostalgia*

Neo-Ottomanism, which aims to revitalize the power, glory and magnificence associated with the Ottoman Empire in contemporary Turkey is a political ideology, tool for social cohesion, a cultural identity and an aesthetic understanding. Moreover, this ideology with its nationalist and Islamic basis suggests the patriarchal imperial structure as a legitimation ground of gender roles and thus has an effect on gender inequalities in the country. For observing the impact of neo-Ottomanism on culture and gender roles, popular Turkish TV series on Ottoman history and their visualisations of the splendour of palace and harem life constitute an important starting point. Henna night, a Turkish wedding ritual in which bride and her female friends and kin get together in a house to celebrate the wedding, is a tradition which is reborn in big cities with these inspirations. In recent years these nights are organized by professional organization firms in a way that aims to make the bride feel like a sultan and make the guests experience an Ottoman palace atmosphere. The henna houses (*kına konakları*) which are opened in Hamamarkası, a newly restored and rebuilt historic neighbourhood of Ankara, have been the pioneering small enterprises which offer this service in a specially decorated harem-like mansion. This paper is based on the field research which aims to examine the neo-Ottoman henna nights as a process of reinventing traditions and the gender roles they imply through a theoretical perspective based on Svetlana Boym's and Jean Baudrillard's conceptualizations of power and nostalgia. The fieldwork which has been taking place in Ankara, particularly in Hamamarkası and Istanbul comprises observations in henna nights and in-depth, semi-structured interviews with women who had this experience as brides and owners of organization companies. Additionally, online sources such as social media accounts and web sites of henna houses and organization companies are used as secondary data. The paper will discuss the interconnections between cultural heritage, nostalgia, uses of history, and aestheticization of gender hierarchies as well as addressing the new tradition as a product of wedding industry in a neoliberal economic and political context.