

The Futures Past of the Ottomans

Workshop organized by Olivier Bouquet

Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023 (9:00 – 18:30)

Université Paris Cité

Bâtiment Olympe de Gouges – salle 830

8 Place Paul Ricœur – 75013 PARIS



Commemoration of the victory of Manzikert (Aug. 26, 2022).
(Official website of the Turkish Presidency of the Republic)

9:00 – Welcome and Coffee

9:15 – Opening Remarks

Session 1: “New Turkey”: What Kind of State?

Chair: Élise Massicard (CERI, Paris)

9:30 – Samuele Abrami (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan; Sabancı University, Istanbul)

Nostalgia for the Past in the “New Turkey”. Between Kemalist Utopia and Islamist Dystopia

Discussant: N. Moudouros

10:00 – Nikos Moudouros (University of Cyprus, Nicosia)

“We are not a Tribal State”: The Multiple Uses of Ottoman History for a “Strong State”

Discussant: T. Dudlák

10:30 – Tamás Dudlák (ELTE University, Budapest)

The Rise of Civilisational States: Civilisational Discourse in Turkey

Discussant: S. Abrami

11:00 – Coffee Break

Session 2: Erdoganism's Futures Past/Pasts Future

Chair: Fatma Müge Göçek (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor)

11:20 – Ayşe Bozkurt (Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen)

Frames of Erdoğanism: The Pasts Future of "Payitaht: Abdülhamid"

Discussant: O. Bouquet

11:50 – Olivier Bouquet (Université Paris Cité, CESSMA, IUF)

"Dieses west noch": Erdoğan, Being and Time

Discussant: A. Bozkurt

13:00 – Lunch Break

Session 3: Unpacking neo-Ottomanism

Chair: Ahmet İnel (Galatasaray University, Istanbul)

14:30 – Barış Zeren (CETOBaC, EHESS, Paris)

Hamidism Beyond the Myth: The Fragile Sovereign and the April 2017 Regime

Discussant: I. C. Schick

15:00 – Fatma Müge Göçek (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor)

Weaponization of neo-Ottomanism as Soft Power: Sultan Abdülhamid, President Erdoğan and Women's National Volleyball Team

Discussant: B. Zeren

15:30 – İrvin Cemil Schick (CETOBaC, EHESS, Paris)

Occult Practices in Erdoğan's Turkey, in Historical Context

Discussant: F. M. Göçek

16:00 – Coffee Break

Session 4: After the Ottomans

Chair: M'hamed Oualdi (Sciences Po, Paris)

16:30 – Aline Schlaepfer (University of Basel)

History-writing in Iraq after the Ottomans. Between Hamidianism, Constitutionalism, and Kemalism

Discussant: E. Szurek

17:00 – Emmanuel Szurek (CETOBAC, EHESS, Paris)

Onomastic Proofs: The non-Muslims and Their Names

Discussant: A. Schlaepfer

17:30 – Roundtable Discussion & Concluding Remarks

The Futures Past of the Ottomans

Abstracts



Erzurum, day of the first tour of the presidential elections
(May 14, 2023, ©Olivier Bouquet)

S. C.A. Abrami, Nostalgia for the Past in the “New Turkey”. Between Kemalist Utopia and Islamist Dystopia

The now twenty-year AKP party's power has certainly brought radical changes, both in the domestic sphere and in the foreign posture of Turkey. A crucial role is played by the “New Turkey” (*Yeni Türkiye*) project, both an electoral manifesto and a novel popular imaginary involving politics, culture, business and everyday life. This vision, characterized by Islamist features, anti-western rhetoric, and memories of the Ottoman golden age, has somehow succeeded in discarding the old Kemalist dream of Westernization as a utopian top-down and exclusionary social engineering process. At the same time, the *Yeni Türkiye* project draws on commodified reinterpretations of history and a glorification of the Ottoman past. Therefore, this chapter aims to show how, despite apparently supporting two contrasting ideas of Turkey's state/nation-building process, both the Kemalist and New Turkey projects deal with their own nostalgia for the past that lies at the brink of an utopian dystopian divide.

O. Bouquet, “Dieses west noch”: Erdoğan, Being and Time

“Erdoğanism” represents something different in 21st-century Turkey than a mere revenge of history or a will to piece together the fragments of its past. Indeed, it incorporates the imprints of the past and projects signs of the future. But above all, it creates a specific relationship between being and time: not only being unjustifiably disposed for a world is grounded “in the process of having been”, but “making present” has turned a “not yet” into a “ready-at-hand.” As a consequence, the “futures past” that existed during the time of Mustafa Kemal is altered. First, the Ottoman past is not discarded but rather brought into the present: as it has been, so shall it be. Second, the chronology of Kemalism is duplicated in the launch of the “Turkish

century", a dominant theme of the AKP's electoral campaign in 2023. Third, the present only gains meaning when oriented towards the future. All in all, what is Ottoman continues to be and advances in today's world; what comes into being depends on what continues to be; what happens today happens for tomorrow. Present, past, and future are unified. This is revealed through the precise study of the speeches given by candidate Erdoğan during his own succession campaign, from September 3, 2022 (in Samsun) to June 3, 2023 (in Ankara, the date of the inauguration).

A. Bozkurt, Frames of Erdoğanism: The Past's Future of "Payitaht: Abdülhamid"

This research paper explores the utilization of strategic framing in conveying key aspects of emerging concept of *Erdoğanism*, focusing on the Turkish historical drama series "Payitaht: Abdülhamid". The investigation meticulously examines how the series reflects and resonates with contemporary Turkish political agenda and the trajectories of Erdoğanism by employing strategic framing. The script frames its plotlines with the core elements of Erdoğanism: Neo-Ottomanism, Turkish-Islamic Synthesis, anti-Westernism, and anti-Kemalism. Through its framing patterns, "Payitaht: Abdülhamid" becomes a powerful instrument for influencing public perception for President Erdoğan's envisioned "New Türkiye." The paper posits that this media production, through strategic framing of the events in the show, influence how audiences interpret the past and connect it with current political landscapes. The study aims to provide a comprehensive frame analysis that discovers the various dimensions of Erdoğanism's depictions in "Payitaht: Abdülhamid" as a popular culture element. The paper further contributes to structured analysis of framing within a specific cultural and political context.

T. Dudlák, The Rise of Civilisational States: Civilisational Discourse in Turkey

This paper builds on the framework of the civilisational state and illustrates the functioning of the civilisational discourse through the case of Turkey in the 21st century. Civilisational state is a concept applicable to a state (political leadership) that defines itself as the leading representative (or possessor) of a particular civilisation. This research explores how Erdoğan defines the nature, orientation, and goals of the Turkish political-ideological system he has built over the years and how the Turkish government thematised the issue of Islamic civilisation and the Ottoman Empire in its political agenda (regarding the issues of identity, national goals, moral values, and relations with the West). The aim is to identify and explain the changes in the official civilisational identity of the ruling party since 2002.

After 2002, the Turkish leadership largely followed the Western and European development models. However, Turkish public opinion slowly lost faith in the European Union, and the political leadership exploited this shift. The neo-Ottoman civilisational discourse fitted in well with Turkey's increasing activism in the Middle East and the Balkans in the mid-2000s. By the 2010s, the confrontational civilisational discourse, based on a critique and rejection of 'Western values,' was no longer only used for domestic purposes and identity-making, but the AKP began to utilise it as an explanation for the rapid regional changes around Turkey. The Islamist roots of the ruling party allowed the anti-Western narrative of the Turkish Islamist

tradition to gain strength. In parallel, alternative anti-Western readings of Turkish identities, such as Eurasianism, also strengthened in the Turkish political scene.

F. M. Göçek, Weaponization of neo-Ottomanism as Soft Power: Sultan Abdülhamid, President Erdoğan and Women’s National Volleyball Team

Sociologically, neo-Ottomanism refers to a cultural movement currently active in especially modern Turkey that was established on the mainland of the Ottoman Empire in Asia Minor; it privileges nostalgia for the Ottoman past that structurally ended in 1923 with the establishment of the Turkish Republic. The content of this nostalgia depends on the context that acquires different meanings that are layered across time and place, with cultural elements like Ottoman cuisine, art, and lifestyle eventually intersecting with political elements such as the Ottoman system of rule, privileged position of Muslims in imperial state and society that in turn interacts with economic elements, such as developing new trade ties with old Ottoman principalities throughout the world. Neo-Ottomanism becomes weaponized by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan who symbolically adopts the Ottoman lineage to culturally legitimate his rule in opposition to the Turkish Republican secular lineage of the Republican founder and First President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. This legitimation has now been finalized in the aftermath of the last 2023 general elections when Erdoğan’s neoliberal combination of election fraud, corruption, and elimination of the rule of law has destroyed any vestige of democratic rule, making his reign totalitarian. I conclude by arguing that secular Turkish state and society can only resist this authoritarian rule that has co-opted the Ottoman past as its very own by developing their own alternate interpretation of Ottomanism. I employ a recent political cartoon of the Türkiye national volleyball team’s current World and European Championships as an example of such a site of resistance to the hegemonic neo-Ottomanism of Erdoğan.

N. Moudouros, “We Are Not a Tribal State”: The Multiple Uses of Ottoman History for a “Strong State”

One of the key developments of the long-running rule of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey has been the emergence of a new conception of Ottoman history and imperial heritage. Through this new conception, the ruling party in Turkey sought to transform the content of the notion of nation and at the same time to define the country’s future orientations. However, further to the aforementioned, the ideological use of Ottoman history in recent years has greatly influenced perceptions of the state itself. Ottoman history and imperial heritage have constituted important foundations for AKP ideological legitimisation in its pursuit of a *strong state* and the transition to the presidential system. This article focuses precisely on the study of the relationship between the new conception of Ottoman history and the notion of the *strong state*, as this relationship has developed during AKP rule. This study is divided into three parts. The first deals with the study of the use of Ottoman history by AKP to “Islamise and Ottomanise” the history of the republican state in Turkey. It highlights the key sources of the effort to invent “imperial traditions” for the state founded in 1923 and through this to legitimise a new historiography. The second part focuses on the analysis of the ideological heritage that has influenced AKP’s perception of the need for a *strong state*. Re-

conquering the state and restoring its imperial heritage are among the basic notions analysed in the second part with the aim of underlining the centrality of state and the Ottoman history in conservative political thought and its political alliances. Finally, the third part of the article highlights the ways in which Ottoman history and the notion of a *strong state* have contributed to the establishment of the new ruling alliance in Turkey between AKP and the Nationalist Action Party (MHP), based on certain key events such as the failed coup attempt of July 2016. In this way, the article aims to underline the relationship between the ideological use of Ottoman history by the broader Turkish Right, as well as addressing the central question of power.

İ. C. Schick, Occult Practices in Erdoğan's Turkey, in Historical Context

A short tour around the Internet would suffice to convince anyone that occult sciences are enjoying remarkable popularity in Erdoğan's Turkey. Publications and web sites centered on astrology, amulets and talismans, dream interpretation, and physiognomy—to name but a few—are everywhere. Furthermore, much of their content exhibits a good deal of continuity not only with Ottoman antecedents but, through them, with medieval Arabic (not to mention Ancient Greek, Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Jewish) sources. This makes the contemporary popularity of occult practices in Turkey doubly interesting, since the tradition was ostensibly interrupted by the early Republican period's Kemalist partiality to Enlightenment scientism and antipathy towards Islamic culture. How, then, is one to explain the endemic suspension of disbelief that leads so many in Turkey today to find these practices and pseudo-sciences compelling? Is this just another aspect of neo-Ottomanism, perhaps, or a specifically Turkish type of postmodernism?

While much of the popularity of occult practices seems to be limited to the religious-conservative (*muhâfazakâr*) sectors of society, it would be too easy to dismiss it as just another manifestation of the resurgence of obscurantism under Erdoğan's leadership, particularly since the issue is by no means unique to contemporary Turkey. In this talk I shall focus on a small number of case studies to explore the forms taken by occult practices in contemporary Turkey, emphasizing in particular both the links to their Ottoman forerunners and the ways in which they differ from them. I shall argue that such practices are well articulated with modern life—in other words, that they are less the signs of a “return” to Ottoman ways than instances of thoroughly modern acculturation. Whether this is because one tends to overestimate the sway of Weberian “disenchantment” (*Entzauberung*) in contemporary society, or because “re-enchantment” is now in full swing, the fact remains that occult practices, albeit in “modernized” garb, do appear to provide satisfactory answers to many modern citizens' concerns in Turkey today.

A. Schlaepfer, History-Writing in Iraq after the Ottomans. Between Hamidianism, Constitutionalism, and Kemalism

Historical scholarship on post-Ottoman spaces has first identified a general will to break away from the legacy of the Ottoman Empire, in particular from the memory of a devastating war, marked by famine, mass murders, natural disasters and multiple other traumas. After a phase of intentional amnesia of the Ottomans, came an era of nostalgia. Substantially, an

Islamicizing-revisionist narrative attempted to rehabilitate the Ottomans, by focusing on the virtues of the Ottoman Islamic caliphate, in particular on the figure of Sultan Abdülhamid II as the great Muslim savior against European imperialism. While neo-Ottomanism – namely a Conservative-Islamic interpretation of history that glorifies the Ottoman Muslim past for the purpose of spreading various forms of Turkish imperialism – first spread within Turkish speaking spheres, its influence soon also extended to the Balkans, the Caucasus and Arab countries, especially with the growing expansionist foreign policies of Turkey in these regions. This binary *regime of historicity* (Hartog 2003) – first amnesia, then nostalgia – is partly problematic, as it suggests that between the end of Ottoman rule and recent neo-Ottoman reinterpretations of history, historians in post-Ottoman spaces have expressed very little interest in the Ottoman Empire, and that retrospective thinking about the Ottomans is an entirely new phenomenon. However, an increasing number of researches (Fortna 2011, Mills, Reilly & Philliou 2011 and Provence 2017 – to name a few) have suggested that multiple forms of remembering the Ottomans have co-existed since the very early period of the state formation. Processes of ruptures and continuities overlapped, and produced conflicting history-writing traditions.

In post-Ottoman Iraq, disillusion with the British mandate administration emerged, from the very early days of the formation of the state already. This, in turn, led some to take a more lenient look at Ottoman history, as a necessary alternative to identity formation. In this contribution, I propose to explore various traditions of history-writing about the Ottomans, in Iraq. I ask how and for what purposes Iraqi historians “domesticated” (Lowenthal 1996) the Ottoman past(s) in various ways – between Hamidianism, constitutionalism, and Kemalism. I eventually contend that since the very early period of state formation in fact, Iraqi historians have provided complex and nuanced reflections on the imperial period, and on its impact on present and future societies under Ottoman rule. There is a dire need to *unpack neo-Ottomanism* (Yavuz 2020) and this is an attempt to contribute to the debate.

E. Szurek, Onomastic Proofs: The non-Muslims and Their Names

Unlike that of place names, the question of the names of the non-Muslims in Turkish linguistic context remains an under-problematized subject. Truly, it has given rise to valuable pages in many works (e.g. Baer, Bali, Bouquet, Ekmekçioğlu, Türköz). I myself could establish the differentialist (rather than assimilationist) normative scope of the surname law (1934). Now, for a decade, inspired by French sociologist Nicole Lapierre, I have been collecting what I call onomastic proofs: archival, literary, testimonial or media occurrences where the onomastic question, whether of “ordinary” citizens or celebrities, comes to pose a “problem”, from the 1920s to the 2020s. This may be because the name connotes a reputedly “foreign” affiliation (or because its bearer anticipates such a reaction); it may also be that one name is deemed “too Turkish” to be “authentic”, and conceals a “usurpation” (itself associated with some threat), or, on the contrary, a “distinction” (for services rendered); finally, the question of the name always surfaces when one is committed to publicly “revealing” his/her Armenian ancestry. Such occurrences generally take place in highly institutionalized/ritualized contexts (acquiring nationality, military service, elections, mourning) but also very often in everyday life where it is a matter of “living with one’s name” (Ender). Relying on various theoretical paradigms that have been reshaping our understanding of republican Turkey for the past decade, I will argue that the question of people’s names is a valuable prism for interrogating,

with the support of situated and circumstantiated materials, the vicissitudes of non-Muslim condition in Turkish context.

Bariş Zeren, An Hamidism Beyond the Myth: The Fragile Sovereign and the April 2017 Regime

This paper examines the perception of sovereignty embedded in the Hamidist narrative that was followed and championed by pro-government circles alongside the constitutional changes of April 2017, a turning point that abolished the parliamentary regime in Turkey. After adopting various ideological references since its rise to power, the AKP started to establish a monopoly of power around the leadership of Erdoğan after 2014, which was accompanied by the rehabilitation of Sultan Abdülhamid as a mythical second founding father. By elaborating on the myth of Sultan Abdülhamid as it has been transferred to the contemporary Islamist movement and on the power structures of the Hamidian and post-2014 Erdoğan eras, this study critically examines the image of hard power and centralism employed by both regimes. Instead, I argue that it was mainly its content that justifies the fragility and precariousness of sovereign power in the face of a large-scale political crisis that rendered Hamidism a suitable myth for the Erdoğan government.

Campus Map: Access to Olympe de Gouges Building

