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SOCIETÀ PER GLI STUDI SUL MEDIO ORIENTE

TITOLO/TITLE: *'Chaos' as a productive space of negotiation: Turkey's diplomacy in the MENA region mobilizing the legacy of the Ottoman Empire*

PROPONENTE/I – PROPONENT/S: CHIARA PAGANO (UNIVERSITY OF BOLOGNA); NICOLA MELIS (UNIVERSITY OF CAGLIARI)

ABSTRACT (1500 parole/words):

Ever since the early 2000's, Turkey has been gaining an increasingly crucial role in (re)orienting the internationalization of the regime legitimacy's crisis currently affecting the MENA region. This became extremely visible in the unfolding of both the Syrian and Libyan civil wars, and the way Ankara affected how both 'crises' intersected with the most urgent themes of contemporary international politics: e.g., the mobilization and (re)negotiation of national and group identities, sectarianism, but also forced migration, the enforcement of violent border regimes, and the control of both internal and international mobilities.

Recent scholarship has interpreted this shift in Turkish regional politics through the prism of "neo-Ottomanism", suggesting that a "transformational narrative rooted in historical rhetoric" is being mobilized by contemporary Turkey to navigate contemporary socio-political changes – which are often framed in terms of 'chaos' - both at the domestic level and with respect to the extended regional landscape (Hartmann 2013). This is supposedly done through reviving alleged contemporary legacies of the Ottoman Imperial past in Turkish relationships not only with Eastern Europe, but also with the Middle East as well as North and East Africa. In fact, «since the 1990s, Turkey has been using its heritage, religious networks, and shared history to become an important player in several regions— the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Middle East— all of which were, not coincidentally, part of the Ottoman Empire, as well as Central Asia and Muslim sub-Saharan Africa». (Yavuz 2020: 176). This Ottoman nostalgia is probably also for domestic consumption, a nationalist rallying point for Turkish identity in a time of tumult.

And yet, whilst Jeremy Walton and his research group "Empires of Memory" have been investigating the afterlives of the Ottoman Empire in recasting the present and possible futures of Eastern Europe, MENA scholarships have not sufficiently addressed whether and to what extent the legacy of the Ottoman Empire continues to inspire nostalgia, identification, pride, anxiety, skepticism, and disdain in the present of the region.

Aiming to fill in such a scholarly gap, the present panel is open to contributions addressing whether and how the Ottoman imperial past continues to influence regional politics, public life, and political debate in the MENA region, as well as East Africa, both from the Turkish perspective and from within these zones.

Contributions will be particularly welcome that critically engage with the socio-political processes, discourses, and projects mobilizing the Ottoman past for navigating contemporary 'crises', and that can productively enter into conversation with other scholarly works reflecting along the tryptic "memory-history-patrimony".

We believe such an undertaking will shed unprecedented light on how the Ottoman imperial pasts contributes to the articulation of political and cultural horizons that go far beyond the nation-state in the considered regions, as much as the contemporary legacies of the European imperial and colonial powers.

The panel language is English.

References

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PROFILO ACCADEMICO DEL/DELLA/DEI/DELLE PROPONENTE/I – SHORT BIO OF PROPONENTS

Chiara Pagano, Post-Doctoral Researcher, University of Bologna

Chiara Pagano obtained her PhD in African History from the University of "Roma Tre" and is currently post-doctoral researcher within the scope of the Horizon2020 Research Project "*MERGING* - Housing for immigrants and community integration in Europe and beyond: strategies, policies, dwellings and governance". She is also associate researcher to the international research project "*Regions2050*: mobile spaces, porous borders, and pathways of regionalization", coordinated by Pr. Dr. Achille Mbembe at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research of the University of Witwatersrand (Johannesburg).

From 2018 to 2020, she was post-doctoral researcher in African History at the University of Pavia and principal researcher for Italy, Tunisia, and Libya for the international research project "Infrastructure Space and the Future of Migration Management: The EU Hotspots in the Mediterranean Borderscape", funded by the SNIS at the University of Basel and coordinated by Pr. Dr. Bilgin Ayata.

Nicola Melis, a specialist in Near Eastern and Ottoman history, is an Associate Professor at the University of Cagliari, Sardinia. He is a member of the editorial advisory boards of some journals and academic associations. Prof. Melis' current research deals with the idea of Ottoman Africa, past to present. He has shared his ongoing work at numerous international conferences, and has authored several recent articles on the subject.

INDIRIZZI EMAIL/EMAIL ADDRESSES:

Chiara Pagano: chiara.pagano2@unibo.it

Nicola Melis: nmelis@unica.it