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SOCIETÀ PER GLI STUDI SUL MEDIO ORIENTE

TITOLO/TITLE: “Buhran” par excellence: Cultural, Social, and, Identity Crises in the Late Ottoman Era

PROPONENTE/I – PROPONENT/S: ÇİĞDEM OĞUZ, OZEN NERGİS SEÇKİN DOLCEROCCA, ECE ZERMAN, ORÇUN CAN OKAN

CLOSED PANEL

ABSTRACT (1500 parole/words):

The Late Ottoman era is marked with several political, social, and financial crises (came to be referred in the literature as *buhran* singular, *buhranlar* plural). While political and territorial dissolution and military defeats had been subject to a great deal of interest in the Ottoman historiography in the past, recent studies draw attention to the overlooked aspects of the dimension of “crises” stretching it beyond usual frameworks with their focus of interest. This panel is an attempt to understand the reflection of “great crises” on personal lives, on the literature, and on the cultural/intellectual sphere. In doing so, it proposes to rethink the “center” and “periphery” of crises while taking into account a multi-dimensional reflection of upheavals on literary, personal, and social space.

Abstracts for the panel:

1) ORCUN CAN OKAN: CLAIMING INCOME FROM STATES IN TURKEY AND THE ARAB EAST AFTER WORLD WAR I: THE CASE OF SHAKIR NIMET AND HIS MULTIPLE CRISES

In early 1923, Shakir Nimet was among scores of ex-Ottoman officials who felt left out (and thus somewhat accused) after being denied the posts and salaries they believed they deserved in post-Ottoman Turkey and the Arab East. This paper examines the contexts of their claims to income from states amidst political uncertainties, bureaucratic reconfigurations, and financial difficulties. Due to their experiences and connections across postwar Turkey, Syria, and Iraq, former Ottoman officials like Shakir Nimet were situated in transnational networks of power that could facilitate and/or obstruct political change at the local, national, and regional levels. This paper contextualizes Shakir Nimet’s frustrations and expectations as part of those wider networks and contexts. It combines methods of political, social, and cultural history to analyze a diverse body of sources including petitions, state correspondence, and memoirs in Ottoman Turkish, English, French, and Arabic. The paper underscores that ex-Ottoman officials employed an array of strategies to intertwine claims in material terms with claims to reliability and respectability at a time of rapid and radical change. Analyzing these claims facilitates historicizing notions of sacrifice, honor, and loyalty in contexts where allusions to them mattered in concrete, tangible terms. Through these analyses, we can gain precious new insights into the political and socio-cultural foundations of the new regimes established in former Ottoman lands after World War I.

2) OZEN NERGİS SEÇKİN DOLCEROCCA: IMPERIAL DECLINE, DECADENCE AND EDEBİYAT-I CEDİDE AESTHETICS

Decadence in a cultural and aesthetic sense emerges at the historical moment when an empire confronts the perception of its decline and societal decay. This paper demonstrates that, like their French and British contemporaries, decadent aesthetics captured the melancholy spirit of Ottoman intelligentsia, especially after the great losses suffered in the Russo-Turkish war (1877-1878), Abdülhamid’s despotic reign and the quick disintegration of the 1908 revolution. Many historians trace the roots of this crisis back to the seventeenth-century. So, by the turn of the century, the imperial tradition had already been in gradual ‘decline’ for almost three centuries. Yet, the sense of urgency in the empire’s rapidly approaching end was most felt in the 1890s. This paper discusses decadent currents in fin-de-siecle Ottoman literature, which found artistic expression in aestheticism, with inspiration from French symbolists, decadents, and Parnassians on one side, and elevated classical Ottoman poetic forms on the other. It will demonstrate examples from Cedide

generation who engaged with aesthetic decadence's signature elements such as consciousness of crisis, resentment, exhaustion, morbidity, ennui, and malaise.

3) ECE ZERMAN: MODERNIZATION CRISES IN THE LATE OTTOMAN EMPIRE SEEN THROUGH PERSONAL NARRATIVES

This paper will focus on first person narratives in order to investigate the ways in which the social and cultural transformations that affected the late Ottoman society were experienced in the individual level. I will particularly discuss conflicts and crises raised by the introduction of new forms related to material culture. The crises referred here are located in everyday life and are stemming from rapid changes that created a gap between the old and the new. New manners of decorating interior spaces, new everyday objects, new clothes and table manners; all these created various reactions, often raised a sense of uneasiness and mobilized multiple emotions. Putting the light on personal experiences allows to bring the debate on modernization to a more concrete and material level.

4) CIGDEM OGUZ: MORAL CRISIS AND ITS AFTERMATH: THE QUEST FOR A NEW LIFE IN THE LATE OTTOMAN ERA

This paper focuses on how political and social crises were often translated into concerns over morality in the late Ottoman Empire. In analyzing the preconditions that led to the emergence of moral crisis debates in society, it formulates morality as a significant phenomenon through which "saving the state" and "establishing a new society" came to be associated with each other. While "moral values and their betterment" is often considered within the framework of private sphere, the late Ottoman intellectuals widened the scope of morality into a social project, formulating the latter as the basis for a radical reform in the realms of education, family, law, education, and social life. Throughout the paper, I will employ the morality debates that took place in the Ottoman press and discuss the social organizations that were established in the final years of the Empire for the betterment of social morality.

THE PANEL WILL BE IN ENGLISH

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Özen N. Seckin Dolcerocca is an Associate Professor at the University of Bologna. She received her doctoral degree in Comparative Literature from NYU in 2016. She is the recipient of a 2020 European Research Council (ERC) Starting Grant for her project 'Modernizing Empires: Enlightenment, Nationalist Vanguard and Non-Western Literary Modernities'.

Ece Zerman is a postdoctoral researcher at InVisu, Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art in Paris. She received her Ph.D. in history at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS). She holds MA and M.Res. degrees from the history departments of Boğaziçi University in İstanbul and the European University Institute in Florence. She taught at INALCO (Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales), Paris and at Strasbourg University. Her research focuses on social and cultural history of the late Ottoman Empire and early Republic of Turkey, with a particular interest in personal narratives, photography, and domestic interiors.

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