

XV Convegno SeSaMO

Università degli Studi di Napoli L'Orientale

22-24 giugno 2022



SOCIETÀ PER GLI STUDI SUL MEDIO ORIENTE

TITOLO/TITLE: *The Politics of Inclusion and Exclusion in Turkey's Popular Culture since the Cold War*

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ABSTRACT (1500 parole/words):

Turkey has a very rich history of cultural production since the early years of the Republic. Currently the country is, for instance the second producer and exporter of television series worldwide. The cultural history has ever since had a profound political dimension, embedded into the negotiating dynamics of power relations and ideas what "good culture" was/is. Oftentimes cultural productions have served the process of constructing a self while engaging in the politics of inclusion and exclusion societal groups and ideas. As literature has shown, modern Turkish history can be understood as being in institutional and discursive crisis mode due to power struggles described by Akkoyunlu and Öktem (2016)¹ as "Existential Insecurity". This trait of Turkish political history and its authoritarian consequences has characterized until today both manifestations of official cultural productions as well as the cultures of critique and protest.

By proposing the present panel and in the context of the main topic of the conference, we aim at analyzing how these modes of crisis and change are reflected in the course of the history of modern Turkey's cultural and artistic production. The panel will approach the theme with five individual papers mainly focused on music and television series production covering a timeframe from the Cold War years up until the present.

Papers:

Carlotta De Sanctis paper will be entitled

The Scream of a Crisis: Looking at the 1990s in Turkey Through the Lent of Punk.

Punk in Turkey started to appear at the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, at first involving young people who had grown up and been socialized in political terms after the breakdown of the 12th September coup d'état. So, punk emerged in Turkey after the introduction of neo-liberal policies as a scream of a generation "in crisis" that through punk was trying to express its dissent. By observing this phenomenon not only in its common aesthetics that embrace transnational dimensions but in its specific local production, it is possible to recognize some of the central issues addressed by the punk scene in Turkey of the time. Thus, although punk may often see itself as an 'anti-establishment' movement, it is also part of socio-cultural history and could give a peculiar lent

¹ Karabekir Akkoyunlu & Kerem Öktem (2016) Existential insecurity and the making of a weak authoritarian regime in Turkey, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 16:4, 505-527, DOI: [10.1080/14683857.2016.1253225](https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2016.1253225)

thought which look at broader social processes. Looking not only at music but mostly at the written production related to punk in Turkey during the 1990s (i.e. the production of fanzines), this contribution aims to identify how the social and cultural crisis of the time was internalized, expressed and reproduced by the local underground punk scene.

Aysel Özdilek's paper will be entitled

Gendered bodies. Fashion and Motherhood in Turkish TV drama.

Turkish prime-time dramas do not only reflect the hegemonic values and norms of a predominantly Muslim society, but are a powerful medium for negotiating these norms and discourses in a social environment shaped by political polarization and crisis. Especially the female body is a central theme of political conflict in Turkish society, which is strongly carried out through gendered bodies and is often reflected in Turkish television series. As is customary in patriarchal contexts in which the stories move, gender norms and the female body are popular targets of power. In this light dress is a central medium of doing gender. As a multi-faceted and dynamic matter, fashion shapes gender norms, but has also the ability to exceed this.

The focus of the paper will be a special piece of clothing, which is primarily associated with a type of woman in Turkish TV maternal dramas: a middle-aged mother, who is bound in patriarchal structures, has to challenge different difficulties, who is selfless, mostly poor and far away from her sexual identity but is beautiful and good enough to find new love. Apart from the rich, always stylish mother, this image of the mother is being pushed and characterized by one typical vestimentary object in most TV dramas – her dress! While seemingly modest, anatolian, conventional and unspectacular, this dress actually emphasizes an high aestheticized and sexualized female body. The paper is intended to show that the mythologizing of „the mother“ is staged through this ambivalence: On the one hand the classical expectations surrounding the „mother role“ are subverted and questioned, but on the other hand they are being reproduced at the same time. Using various examples the paper will depict the exciting meanings and discourses produced by this image of motherhood and its role in the patriarchal system of Turkey.

Christoph Ramm's paper will be entitled

Rock, Revolution and the Quest for 'Authentic' Music - Turkish Pop Music of the 1960s and 1970s between Radical Creativity and Increasing Politicization.

Parallel to the development of global pop music, Turkish pop also experienced its first great heyday in the 1960s. For the first time, worldwide cultural trends in popular music were followed simultaneously in Turkey. 45rpm vinyl records and music competitions spread musical styles such as rock'n'roll, beat, garage rock, and later psychedelic rock and progressive rock all over Anatolia. Young Turkish bands did not limit themselves to covering hits of Western pop and rock music. Instead, they creatively adopted Western styles and merged them with Turkish folk songs to create their own innovative style - *Anadolu Pop*.

The increasing politicization of Turkish society after 1968 also affected pop music. In the 1970s, the radical creativity of *Anadolu Pop* faded under the rising influence of politicized folk music. The turn to Turkish folk music (*türkü*) was an expression of a quest for cultural 'authenticity' and closeness to 'the people', a combination of folkloristic nostalgia and political commitment that could even reach the degree of nationalism.

Kenan Behzat Sharpe's paper will be entitled

Contemporary Turkish Music on the Global Market.

While Turkey has become a major exporter of television series across both the Middle East and the world, Turkish music has historically had a more difficult time as a cultural export in Western Europe and North America despite closely following musical trends there since the 1950s. This paper discusses contemporary music in Turkey and explores the reasons why Turkish music has begun to establish a foothold in ever-changing global markets. The paper focuses on three sets of musicians with different strategies for navigating between an 'authentic' local self and global aspirations, thus revealing different potential solutions to the identity crisis within popular culture. This crisis stems from a desire to speak to both local and foreign audiences, accept influence while producing something recognizable "Turkish." I focus first on the contemporary reception of Anadolu Rock, the 1960s-1970s genre combining Turkish folk music with rock 'n' roll. The 're-discovery' of classic Anadolu Rock musicians like Selda Bağcan by contemporary listeners in Europe and the U.S. has opened up the space for musical acts like Altın Gün and Gaye Su Akyol to achieve international acclaim among both listeners and major organizations like the Grammys and Songlines. Secondly, the paper focuses on the growing global popularity of Turkish rap, particularly the music of Ezhel. Breaking down the barriers of what makes Turkish rap "Turkish," Ezhel's music engages in linguistic code-switching that de-centers the music from a national context while also claiming a certain kind of localness. Third, the paper focuses on a number of Turkish indie bands (She Past Away, Palmiyeler, the Ringo Jets) who have gained international fame, at least among certain niche audiences, while rejecting the strategy of auto-Orientalizing or using local musical cues. Overall, the paper argues that paying attention to contemporary music trends and popular culture in Turkey reveals an artistic crisis that requires navigating between local and global cultural codes, idioms, and styles.

Ali Sonay's paper will be entitled

"A War of Series"? Middle Eastern History between Competing Narratives in Turkish and Arab Television Dramas. It will focus on the intertextuality of contemporary Turkish and Arab historical series. The popularity of television series has increased significantly in recent years on a global scale. The disseminated texts and images thereby assume different meanings of (soft)power relations both in the countries of production and transnational consumption. For decades after the end of the Ottoman Empire, Turkish-Arab relations/perceptions were characterized by distance. This context, however, has begun to change since the beginning of the 2000s, resulting in a re-negotiation process of common, particularly Ottoman history.

One of the main platforms of this conflict is popular culture, specifically television series. Turkish TV series have become increasingly popular in the Arab world over the past decade; it is now one of the largest series exporters worldwide. The broadcast of "Resurrection Ertuğrul" (*Diriliş: Ertuğrul*, 2014-2019), for example, reflects a narrative of history in which the Ottoman Empire (implicitly Turkey) holds role with the ambition to end the crisis in the Islamic world. In the perception of Arab viewers this has led to Turkey and the Ottoman Empire appearing in a new positive light, combining elements such as "Islamic, secular, modern, economically successful, being conscious of its own history." Scholarship has so far focused on the political meaning of these series within Turkey and the popularity among Arab audiences. This paper will, therefore, argue that there is also an "Arab" narrative emerging as an alternative to the "neo-Ottoman" Turkish productions.

The Saudi-Emirati broadcaster MBC (*Middle East Broadcasting Center*), for instance, broadcasted in 2019/20 "Kingdoms of Fire", which explicitly aims to reduce the media presence of Turkish series among Arab viewers, referring to the history of the Ottoman Empire in the region.

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

Carlotta De Sanctis is a postdoctoral research fellow at the Department of Architecture and Arts, Università IUAV of Venice. Focusing on underground and youth movements in Turkey she is now working in particular on punk fanzine. Her last publication on this topic is entitled "«We Didn't Forget to Take Our Shoes Off at the Door Just Because We Were Punks» The Earlier Years of Punk in Turkey". She is Co-founder of the independent online magazine on contemporary Turkey *Kaleydoskop – Turchia, cultura e società* and editor of a digital archive of punk-zines *TRAVMA – Collective Memory of Punk in Turkey*.

Aysel Özdilek is a PhD student in Turkish Studies at the Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz. Her dissertation focuses on the trends, aesthetics, and discourses of Turkish television series culture since 2005. Her research interests are in the history of Turkish film and popular culture in Turkey. Recently she published an essay on İlhan Mimaroglu entitled „Waiting Room of Possibilities“ on *Norient* (2021) and "Turkey meets trash porn. Die türkische Sexploitationwelle der Yeşilçam-Ära 1974-1980" in *Scandal: Cinema 65*, 2020.

Christoph Ramm is researcher and instructor for Turkish language and history at the Institute for Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Bern. Focusing on the modern history and particularly on Nationalism, Identity, and Cultural politics, he has published extensively, among them the latest "Turkey's 'Light' Rock Revolution – Anadolu Pop, Political Music, and the Quest for the Authentic", in: Pekesen, Berna (ed). *Turkey in Turmoil: Social Change and Political Radicalization During the 1960s*. Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2020.

Kenan Behzat Sharpe received his PhD in Literature from the University of California, Santa Cruz in 2019. His research explores the relationship between social movements, poetry, and popular music in Turkey, Greece, and the wider Mediterranean. He currently lives in Istanbul, where he teaches part-time at Boğaziçi University. Sharpe also works as a journalist and writes a weekly column on contemporary art/culture in Turkey for *Duvar English*. He has published his research in the *Journal of Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association*, the *Turkish Historical Review*, and beyond. He is currently writing his first book, *Rockers and Radicals in Anatolia: Turkish Psychedelic Rock and the World 1960s*.

Ali Sonay is lecturer at the Institute for Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Bern. Focusing on the politics and the media systems in Turkey and the Arab World. As the Post-Doctoral Fellow with the University of Cambridge – Al Jazeera Media Project at the University of Cambridge, he has contributed and assisted the special issues on “Media in Turkey” in *Middle East Critique* (27/2, 2018) and “Medias in Morocco” in the *Journal of North African Studies* (22/3, 2017).

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