

XVI Convegno SeSaMO

Università degli Studi di Cagliari  
Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche e Sociali

3-5 ottobre 2024



SOCIETÀ PER GLI STUDI SUL MEDIO ORIENTE

**TITOLO/TITLE:** Turkey between the past and today's world. Who's and How's the Other?

**PROPONENTE/I – PROPONENT/s:** SAMUELE C.A. ABRAMI, JACOPO FRANCESCHINI, RICCARDO GASCO, ANDREA NOVELLIS

**ABSTRACT (1500 parole/words):**

Situated at a geopolitical and geographical juncture, Turkey's history and politics are shaped by a continuous dialogue between its internal dynamics, regional setting, and engagement with the wider world. From the Ottoman Empire to the birth and consolidation of the modern Turkish Republic until nowadays, the question of identity has been central to Turkey's evolution. This is because it grapples with its multiethnic, multicultural, and heavy historical heritage while forging a path forward in an ever-changing global landscape. These peculiarities originate and characterize how Turkey sees itself and others, from identity questions to nation-state-building processes until national role conception in the international arena. Despite a wide body of literature, one can bring it down to a concept that captures all these nuances, namely "Turkey's in-betweenness" (Rumelili & Suleymanoglu-Kurum, 2017).

Scholars of Turkish history and politics have long emphasized the complexities inherent in Turkey's quest for modernization and its search for a distinct identity amidst the shifting tides of geopolitics. From the reforms of the Tanzimat era to the secularization efforts of the Kemalist period, Turkey has navigated a delicate balance between tradition and modernity, between East and West, while contending with the legacies of its imperial past (Yavuz, 2020). Although Turkey's socio-political realm has passed through watershed periods and frequent ruptures, some elements have been periodically re-emerging: center-periphery dynamics, the quest for strategic independence, struggle for democratization, civil-military balance, and the omnipresent question related to the "Turkish way of Islam." All of this has historically been coupled with macro and micro dynamics involving people, state, society, leaders, and international relations (Mufti, 2023).

For instance, the Kurdish issue represents a well-documented case encompassing ethnopolitics and security realms (Yegen, 2023). Another one is the Turkish state's foundational elements in terms of centralization of power and the looming top-down approach. This has recently become evident in increased authoritarianism that, despite building on the strong Kemalist state apparatus, has been gradually reshaped by new political figures blending Turkish nationalism, nativism, and populism with Islamism (Gumuscu, 2024). This evolving landscape also reflects in the shifting identities and roles of the "internal others" within the national narrative, marking a continuous redefinition of opposition and dissent.

Turkey's socio-political influences and dynamics over the construction of identities cross the physical borders, reaching the digital realm. Digital penetration in Turkey is witnessing a considerable increase with an impact on several milieus: the young demographic population and in social media usage; the development of nationalism constructions accompanied by melancholia or nostalgia for the past; the (re)creation of collective identities for minorities, ideological and religious movements (Islamists and Neo-Kemalists) until Turkish diasporas and foreign policy exploitations. (Zagidullin, Aziz & Kozhakhmet, 2021)

Moreover, in recent decades, Turkey has set itself as a key player in regional and global affairs, asserting its influence in the Middle East, Europe, and beyond. Some have lately defined it as a "modified middle power" (Altunışık, 2023), highlighting once again the (apparent or actual) ambiguity of Turkey's foreign policy and its impact on how the "others" perceive it. An overarching theme regards Turkey's self-other relation with Europe that includes ebbs and flows regarding identity, institutional and normative frameworks as well as its impact on Turkey's domestic dynamics (Ruacan, 2020). If this type of relation traditionally applied to Turkey's perception of and within the West, its increased foreign policy activism has reproduced similar – yet different – dynamics in other regions, ranging from the Middle East to Africa, from the Balkans to Central Asia. Although in a different fashion, sociopolitical dynamics pertaining to minorities like Azeri and Turkmen are relevant elements to understanding Turkey's presence in different areas, whether being in the form of increasing visibility through

soft power or increasing political or military presence in conflicts at its borders, such as in Syria, Iraq, and the Nagorno-Karabakh.

Against this backdrop, the concept of "self and other" offers an eclectic lens to understand Turkey's complex relationships with internal and external actors, shedding light on the nuances of its identity formation process and its quest for a greater role in the international arena (Gülsah Çapan & Zarakol, 2019). To investigate Turkey's identity, politics, and role in international affairs, our panel encourages a multidisciplinary approach that draws on insights from history, political science, sociology, and international relations. This panel invites contributions examining Turkey's responses to historical and contemporary challenges through the lens of "self and others." This approach aims to offer fresh perspectives to our understanding of Turkey's position in the global context. We encourage submission of papers related, but not limited to, the following topics:

- Constructing the Other: Ideologies, Ethnic Identity and Minority Rights in Turkey
- Polarization and Political Othering in Contemporary Turkey
- Turkey's Foreign Policy and the Quest for Regional Leadership
- Turkey, the West and the Others
- Gender, Migration, and Social Inclusion in Turkey
- Historical Narratives and Turkey's Quest for Identity
- Power dynamics: state, institutions, and political actors
- Making sense of "in-betweenness" in today's multicomplex world
- Turkey's geographical liminality: Who's and How's the other?
- Turkey's construction and reinvention of identities in the digital sphere

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

**Andrea Novellis** is a Ph.D. candidate in Political Studies at NASP - University of Milan. His research focused on rebel governance and power-sharing during civil wars and he has conducted fieldwork in Turkey, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Sri Lanka. He is co-founder of the Italian Network for Kurdish Studies (RISC). He has published on feminism and nationalism in the Kurdish movement, and his work has been presented at various international conferences.

**Riccardo Gasco** is a Ph.D. Candidate in Political and Social Sciences at the University of Bologna. He holds a background in International Relations and Diplomatic Sciences, which he obtained from the University of Genoa and the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. His current research interests are focused on Türkiye's foreign policy, the Middle East, and Türkiye's relations with NATO and Russia. His research project investigates the foreign policy behavior of emerging middle powers, using Türkiye as a case study. He divides his time between Italy and Türkiye for research and work purposes. Currently, he is a Visiting Research Fellow at Sabanci Univerisiy.

**Jacopo Franceschini** is a Ph.D. Candidate at the International Relations Department of Kadir Has University (Istanbul), focusing on cybersecurity and cyber governance and regulation in Turkey and the Mediterranean region. Differences and commonalities among strategies, approaches, and legislation in cybersecurity in

Mediterranean and Middle Eastern countries are his main areas of expertise and interest. Jacopo is currently research coordinator at theSquare-Mediterranean Centre for Revolutionary Studies and has worked as a researcher on security matters in several think tanks between Belgium and Turkey, such as the European Neighbourhood Council (Brussels), Friedrich Naumann Foundation, and Istanbul Policy Center. He holds a Master's in Law from the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart (Milan) and a Specializing Master's in Middle Eastern Studies at ASERI (Graduate School of Economics and International Relations of Milan).

**Samuele C.A. Abrami** is a PhD candidate at the UCSC in Milan, where he is also subject expert in the courses of Geopolitics and History and Institutions of Asia. He is research assistant at the International Center for Contemporary Turkish Studies and Ce.St.In.Geo. Samuele is now visiting researcher at Sabancı University in Istanbul, where he is working on his project about the link between internal and external dimensions in Turkish Foreign Policy as well as on Türkiye's relations with the EU, Balkans and Wider Mediterranean. Since 2023, he is part of the Türkiye- Europe Future Forum, of the German-Italian Spinelli Forum, and a CM-Lerici recipient at the Stockholm Institute for Turkish Studies.

**INDIRIZZO/I EMAIL/EMAIL ADDRESSES:**

[Andrea.novellis@unimi.it](mailto:Andrea.novellis@unimi.it) ; [jacopofranceschini5@stu.khas.edu.tr](mailto:jacopofranceschini5@stu.khas.edu.tr) ; [samuelecarloayrton.abrami@unicatt.it](mailto:samuelecarloayrton.abrami@unicatt.it) ; [riccardo.gasco2@unibo.it](mailto:riccardo.gasco2@unibo.it)