



Report on “Ottoman Continuities – Republican Inventions: Symposium in Honor of Erik Jan Zürcher”

23–25 August 2018, Leiden University

“This is not a goodbye!” was the motto of a very special gathering that took place at Leiden University between 23–25 August 2018. Senior and junior scholars of Turkey and the Ottoman Empire came together to honor one of the greatest critical minds of Turkish Studies, Erik Jan Zürcher, and his almost 40 years of scholarship, on the occasion of his upcoming retirement from teaching. Thirty participants from different disciplines and generations representing various universities in The Netherlands, Turkey, France, Great Britain, and the USA gathered to discuss the evolution of the field of Turkish Studies. This diverse group, of course, represented only a fraction of Zürcher’s many friends, colleagues, students, and followers in academia, due to practical limitations. The symposium was designed to be a “meeting of generations” that would serve as a venue for reflection on the past, present, and future of research on the Ottoman Empire and Turkey.

The symposium was not a farewell event for two reasons. First, despite his official retirement on 1 September as the Chair of Turkish Studies, Erik Jan Zürcher will serve as Academic Director of the Leiden Institute of Area Studies at the University of Leiden. Second, and more importantly, Zürcher will continue to work on the several academic projects that he has been presenting ad hoc in combination with his busy schedule as a prolific lecturer, including at conferences and workshops. Most notably, his promising grand project on the prosopography of the Young Turk generation will finally receive due dedication during his otherwise well-earned *buen retiro*.

Consequently, the symposium was not only designed to be an event that honored a prominent scholar’s forthcoming retirement, but also to serve as a forum for connecting recent research agendas and past experiences on the studies of different dynamics of continuity and change from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey. Grouped into four thematic sessions –people, conflicts, ideas, and spaces– the papers presented: (1) illustrated the “state of the art” and its historiographical development in specialized fields; (2) discussed central analytical categories or theoretical concepts in order to indicate future research perspectives; and/or (3) showcased recent or ongoing research on a case study that tackled (one of) the aforementioned themes. Hence, a multi-perspective, multi-disciplinary, and multilayered overview of past and recent developments in the field of Ottoman and Turkish studies was presented and discussed.

The symposium kicked off the start of the program with a talk delivered by Erik Jan Zürcher, in which he reflected on his 40 years of experience in Turkish Studies. Quoting Leslie Poles Hartley's words: "past is a foreign country; they do things differently there," Zürcher elaborated on the research "wave" that caused his entrance to the field that was focused on the transition from empire to nation state. Reflecting on how the official narrative perceived the Republic to be the sole work of Mustafa Kemal, Zürcher explained his work's contribution against the notion of a "clean break" with the Ottoman past and the "established truths" in the field. The old official or hegemonic narrative about the transition from empire to nation state is no longer credible and a much more nuanced and diversified narrative is developing. Yet, Zürcher noted the irony that the current state of official and popular historiography, or the new hegemonic narrative, in contemporary Turkey has become "same but different." In the 1970s, as the young Erik Jan began studying *Turkologie*, the Kemalist paradigm enjoyed full hegemony over the historiographical discourse in which Abdülhamid II was cast as the reactionary tyrant and Atatürk as the sole savior of a new-born nation carved from an outdated empire. Now, 40 years later, we are observing similar statist efforts aiming to dominate the historiographical discourse without nuance and critical scholarship – although, this time, with a completely different twist. As Zürcher noted, Abdülhamid II is cast as the heroic center of an official historiography that legitimates, yet again, an authoritarian and illiberal Turkey.

Erik Jan Zürcher added that despite the worrying turn of events in today's Turkey, Turkish Studies has thrived in the last four decades and has become an internationally respected field both in history and the social sciences. In particular, the growing number of junior scholars originating from Turkey and contributing to critical studies of modern Turkey is a major achievement. Turkish Studies has adopted different paradigms and participated in major debates in international academia in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first century, although without initiating a theoretical innovation on its own. According to Zürcher, not only the number of researchers, but also the quality of research has improved as a result of an unprecedented increase in the quantity of accessible sources through digitalization, growing number of scholars with multiple language skills, and advances in theoretical knowledge. Thanks to these developments, recent studies of modern Turkey have moved beyond Ottoman and Turkish exceptionalisms and offer new insights and revisions, either by exploring distant peripheries, micro localities, and border regions, or by situating the Ottoman and Turkish experience within comparative and connected histories. As Zürcher concluded, these two research trends must be expanded. Zürcher's own revisionist periodization, which connects the previously separate fields of late Ottoman and early Republican history, has flourished immensely ever since he proposed it. Nevertheless, as Zürcher pointed out in his remarks regarding future research goals, the history of the Republic after 1938, especially the period between 1950 and 1980, remains largely understudied and requires new, in-depth consideration.

The first session of papers and discussions centered on the theme "people". As the first presenter, Ethem Eldem discussed the conceptual issues of defining the Ottoman bourgeoisie. Although conventional approaches tend to deny the existence of a Muslim bourgeoisie, Eldem offered a comprehensive understanding of this group based on his close reading of Ottoman Bank documents. He highlighted the need for a cultural definition of the bourgeoisie that would allow the researchers to see it as a larger group, comprising Muslim

and non-Muslim members of the society alike, rather than the classical approaches that view them as fragments. Reşat Kasaba elaborated on the history of the state's relationship with nomads and tribes and called for approaches that underline the fluidity of state–society relationships and the negotiation of interests. Kasaba pointed out that the future of research in the field is likely to be influenced by global trends in family history, environmental history, and regional–local histories. Nicole van Os criticized the methodological frameworks defined by the boundaries of the millet system, which examine religious groups in isolation and produce exceptionalist narratives. Instead, she argued, an appreciation of “trans-milletism” is crucial in rewriting the social and cultural history of the late Ottoman Empire. Due to unforeseen circumstances, Sevgi Adak was unfortunately unable to attend the symposium in person; nevertheless, she was able to join via videoconference. Her paper discussed the rich and growing feminist literature and gender scholarship on Turkey, with a special focus on the feminist criticism of Kemalist reforms and discourse in the early Republican period. Doğan Çetinkaya turned the discussion back to Eldem's intervention on the analytical categories of social class, such as the bourgeoisie, and criticized the prevailing Occidentalism in measuring the Ottoman working –or merchant– classes by the standards of their European counterparts.

The second session revolved around the theme of “conflict”. Fikret Adanır examined the Eastern Question as a complex process of Ottoman decline that needs to be revisited in order to better explain the emergence of Muslim nationalism. Adanır entertained the idea that perhaps “Hamidian-Muslim nationalism” was the only feasible response to the Eastern Question in the eyes of the Empire's decision-makers. Müge Göçek discussed the paths and patterns of continued political violence since the period of the Committee of Union and Progress to the present tenure of the Justice and Development Party. She underlined the necessity of integrating perspectives and trajectories of victims, subalterns, and minorities into a broader picture of Turkey's history. She also discussed the grim situation of those scholars marginalized because of their research areas, positing this as another form of violence. Focusing on World War I, Mustafa Aksakal summarized recent historiographical developments. While he acknowledged the contributions of Ottoman historians to the international and transdisciplinary publications on the centennial of World War I, he pointed out that research on the social history of the Ottoman Army still lacks in-depth analyses in several respects. He suggested that a large-scale (500–1000 individuals), systematic study of Ottoman Army conscripts in World War I would provide valuable vistas of the history of the war. Senem Aslan provided an insightful tour of the growing number of studies on the Kurdish conflict in Turkey. While she recognized the difficulties, and at times impossibility, of accessing the archives on Turkey's recent history in writing proper histories of the Kurdish conflict, she observed an explosion of studies based on memoirs and ego-documents, which contribute to a more nuanced scholarship. In addition, she noted the lack of sufficient comparative analyses by social scientists that would otherwise increase the international recognition of Kurdish Studies. Uğur Derin pointed out the persistent discourse of internal and external enemies in Turkey's political culture. While this pattern of political othering allows certain flexibilities in changing friend–foe attributions based on changing contexts, its overall effect is not only toxic for political debates, but also fateful for those ultimately labeled as internal enemies. Alp Yenen scrutinized the role of the Young Turks after 1918 from the perspective of transnational history. On the one hand, he argued for a complex

approach to making sense of the Committee of Union and Progress's agency at multiple sites. On the other hand, he criticized the reluctance in historiography to appreciate Muslim nationalism as a geopolitical identity layer that transcended populism and opportunism. İpek Yosmaoğlu concluded the session with the rhetorical question, "what can Ottoman History do for you?" She elaborated on her research on the transformative nature of insurgencies in processes of community building. In addition, by illustrating changes in values and perspectives that now increasingly favor the victim and the non-state in Ottoman history, she made the case for how history can accompany societal openings, cross-cultural reconciliations, and post-violence community building.

The third-session papers dealt with the general theme of "ideas". Petra de Bruijn illustrated how fiction on popular television helps us understand the framing of past and contemporary events in Turkey. By creating simple narratives based on moralized claims about Turkey's Ottoman past, television shows have become a significant force in the creation of a new hegemonic discourse in Turkey. Şükrü Hanioglu illustrated the necessity of clearer differentiations and definitions in writing the history of political thought in modern Turkey. According to Hanioglu, the extant Westernization narrative is predominantly based on Ziya Gökalp's original conceptualization. Modern historians have reproduced it, largely missing the nuance and difference between the Young Turks and the Tanzimat intellectuals. Hanioglu states that the Westernists of the Second Constitutional Era were much more superficial than Tanzimat Westernists and actually produced a "debasement" of Westernization that persisted throughout the Republican era. Çağlar Keyder countered epistemologies of a strong "state tradition" by illustrating the incapacities of state coercion in different periods. Despite this, he argued that the Justice and Development Party (AKP) has achieved a notable degree of state power. This "version of modern patrimonialism" has created an unprecedented level of statism in Turkey with serious consequences for state-society relations. Resuscitating secularism, Umut Azak critically revisited different approaches in the study of secularism in Turkey and illustrated the political context of their formulation. She pointed out that neither secularism and secularists, nor atheists receive the same research focus as religious groups. Engin Kılıç pointed out the relevance of the late-Ottoman fictional sources for the history of Ottoman-Turkish modernity. Although Ottoman utopias, such as that presented in Ali Kamil's futurist novels, demonstrate a critical blueprint for later Kemalist and even contemporary notions of statism and progress, the conservative canonization of literature in the early Republic marginalized and trivialized these influential works of Turkish intellectual history. Ömer Koçyiğit showed the continuing influence of the "bad Muslims" discourse by studying the Ottoman perception of the Wahhabi revolt and the Mahdi uprising in Sudan. The Ottoman state propaganda against these uprisings even contributed to the intensification of reactions in the periphery. He argued that the state's claim of monopoly over the public order and the dominant Islamic discourse forced Ottoman and Kemalist state authorities to safeguard the Islamic moral economy against Islamist contenders. Emmanuel Szurek approached the Turkish Language Reform and the Sun Language Theory as a transnational intellectual history. By discussing an episode of dialogue between Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the French grammarian Jean Deny, he elaborated on the challenging questions of qualifying intention and conviction of historical figures in writing their intellectual history.

The theme of “spaces” emerged in the fourth session. While underlining the quality of the Republic of Turkey as a post-Ottoman space, little different from the Balkans and the Middle East, Nathalie Clayer opted for a return to a biographical approach to reconstructing the collective experiences of the ex-Ottoman peoples in the post-Ottoman spaces. Hans Theunissen turned to visual sources in the spatial history of the Ottoman Empire. With a comparative study of religious wall paintings in mosques across Anatolia, he illustrated odd similarities in multiple visual recreations of distant places such as Mecca. Through cross-comparisons with photographic collections, he convincingly traced the transition and alteration of visual source materials across Ottoman spaces in the production of religious wall paintings. The use of the center-periphery model in Turkish Studies received a theoretical and critical re-evaluation from Onur Ada. He showed decisive deviations from the original formulation of Edward Shils’ theory, which contributed to ideas of Turkish exceptionalism. Shils’ model actually assumed the fragmentation of the center and the plurality of the peripheries, key features that were lost in the Turkish model that calls for a reconceptualization. Remzi Çağatay Çakırlar revisited a 28-year-old paper by Zürcher on the influence of the French Radical Party on the Young Turks. As another contribution to transnational intellectual history, this presentation traced the interactions of French Radical Édouard Herriot with the Young Turks and Kemalists over a period of 30 years. These networks were, however, not stable and given. They had to be intentionally reactivated and rechanneled with interaction in different contexts, especially in times of crisis. Emre Erol returned to methodological concerns in his presentation. He posited that comparing and connecting local and regional micro histories with global and macro histories would contribute to the normalization of Ottoman–Turkish history writing and facilitate more comparative research. In the meantime, however, the sheer inflation of sources employed by “glocal” historians and others can be better processed by a commitment to the digital humanities, which enable unparalleled qualitative and quantitative research. Consequently, he argued that the combined use of “glocal” research and the use of digital humanities tools and methods might contribute to a new wave of comparative research in the field. Alex Lamprou discussed the study of provincial Anatolian towns, thus asserting that provincial studies provide great opportunities to measure the extent and grip of social changes and structural continuities in the greater society. Yet, studies of provincial spaces are plagued with numerous conceptual and empirical challenges. Taking the session to its final destination in Eastern Anatolia, Uğur Ümit Üngör discussed recent research approaches that decolonize the historiography by exploring new sources and perspectives. Moreover, he stated that the shared and continued history of human suffering caused by paramilitary violence, demographic engineering, and forced migration in Eastern Anatolia and Syria must be bridged by approaches that cut across nation-state borders as well as disciplinary boundaries.

In the concluding session, Umut Azak highlighted the interconnectedness of the papers presented in the thematic sessions and contextualized their shared topos in the face of Turkey’s current state of affairs and the contrasting achievements accomplished in the academia in recent decades. Returning to Erik Jan Zürcher’s contributions to Turkish Studies, Alp Yenen illustrated the correspondence of individual papers with different phases and perspectives of Zürcher’s research history. The plurality of themes across political, social, cultural, and comparative history as well as social sciences in evidence throughout the

symposium clearly attested to Zürcher's innovative and inspiring oeuvre in Turkish Studies. Finally, Emre Erol underlined the unique characteristics and importance of what he referred to as the "Leiden network" in the study of late-Ottoman and Republican history. The pluralist culture of the network, its accessibility for young scholars, Leiden University's unique research advantages, and the multi-disciplinary track of research in the last two decades were emphasized as the accumulated heritage of the network in which Erik Jan Zürcher played a central role. He expressed his hopes that this "Leiden network" may live, grow, and flourish "without a goodbye."

The lively discussions and the collective enthusiasm clearly indicated that the "Leiden network" would reunite and hopefully expand, with contributions from new scholars in the near future. The participants decided to formulate new research goals inspired by the discussions during the symposium and seek opportunities to organize new meetings.

The symposium was organized by Petra de Bruijn, Dorieke Molenaar, Nicole van Os, Deniz Tat, Hans Theunissen, and the rest of the Turkish Studies team at LIAS/Leiden University. The workshop was made possible by generous financial support from the Faculty of Humanities of Leiden University, the Leiden Centre for the Study of Islam & Society (LUCIS), the Leiden University Fund (LUF), the Leiden Institute for Areas Studies (LIAS), the Stichting Oosters Instituut and Turkish Studies at Leiden University.

As a collective and long-lasting gift for his formal retirement from the Chair of Turkish Studies, Erik Jan Zürcher was presented with a special project from his colleagues, friends, students, and family members. Instead of a traditional *Festschrift* we wanted to honor his contribution to the teaching of Turkish Studies in a way that reflects his educational philosophy. The result is an open access online compendium of his seminal textbook *Turkey: A Modern History* (fourth revised edition; London: I.B. Tauris, 2017) that offers a growing body of class materials, predominantly formulated around relevant primary sources, which can be used for the teaching of the modern history and culture of Turkey to university students all around the world. Last but not least, in special recognition of his achievements as an internationally renowned expert in the field of Turkish studies, with a spectacular ability to disseminate his knowledge to non-experts and the greater Dutch public, Professor Erik Jan Zürcher was awarded a Knighthood in the Order of the Netherlands Lion.

Alp Yenen – Umut Azak – Emre Erol