

Ghosts of Empire: Persistence and Claims of Ottomanity(ies) in Post-Ottoman Spaces*

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In various ways, national historiographies of the Middle East have presented the exit from the Ottoman Empire as a rupture, sometimes accompanied by a denial of heritage, and in any case accompanied by global overhauls of practices and cultural referents. They were built on the idea that national cultures had been “lulled to sleep” over centuries of Ottoman rule, before awaking to the sound of late modernity. The reality of these transformations cannot be denied. Following the rout of Ottoman armies in September-October 1918, the political gap between what remained of the Ottoman state and its former provinces developed very quickly: parliamentary elections were organized in a space reduced roughly to present-day Turkey, Islamo-Christian and Mesopotamian committees were organized within the occupied territories, and communal delegations and programs prepared for the peace conference. Then, following aspirations to independence, the post-Ottoman states confirmed their desire to erase their imperial past and project themselves into a national future. This pivotal period thus bears witness to a multitude of rapid conversions.

Despite a process of purification of the socio-political and cultural references of the Ottoman period, cultivated as a political project by the nationalisms of the region, it seems to us that we are construing the erasure of the Ottoman Empire from the political map as a global inevitability and mechanical necessity. Just as the social engineering of the emergent nation-states was neither immediate, unchallenged, nor in any way systematically opposed to the Ottoman legacy, the cultural engineering did not result in the sudden disappearance of Ottoman

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referents, notably Turkish Ottoman referents in the Arab world, or Arab referents in Republican Turkey. On the contrary, this legacy has often been maintained, sometimes unintentionally, by attachment to known Ottoman forms, sometimes by appropriation or intentional reactivation of an Ottoman remainder, for the purposes of various claims: between persistence and claims of Ottomanity(ies). This issue of REMMM (the *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée*) is therefore interested in the various social, political, cultural, linguistic and literary expressions involved with the hybridization of Ottoman referents in the Turkish and Arab spaces after 1918 – which we call the *ghosts of Empire* – based on visual and material as well as diplomatic or literary documentation.

Decline and modernity of the Ottoman Empire

Historical research first identified a broadly similar and homogeneous process of modernization in the various provinces of the Empire. According to political, cultural, linguistic and literary commentaries, modernity was the result of a fruitful 19th century encounter between Europe and provinces of the Ottoman Empire, an encounter which led to a revival both internally generated and influenced by external powers. For example, among Arab provinces, the exchange of ideas and techniques would lead to the concept of the *Nahḍa*, the term by which the Arabic language refers to the “revival” and renewal of the nineteenth century which fostered the development of literary, cultural and political Arab nationalism, largely influenced by European thought *in the liberal age* (Hourani, 1962). This particular narrative was popularized in one of the earliest histories of Arabic nationalism, *The Arab Awakening* (George Antonius, 1938), which advanced the improbable idea of the emergence of these monolithic national movements, as if they had operated in complete disconnection with the multiple Ottoman influences (Strauss, 2003). In literature, we know that these influences were treated as an expression of decadence, *inḥiṭāt*, a term used in Arabic literary criticism to speak of the literary production over a long period, from the extinction of the Arab caliphate in Baghdad during the Mongol invasions in the 13th century, until the beginnings of the *Nahḍa* in the 19th century. The decline, first identified by Jurjī Zaydān (d. 1914) [Kilpatrick, in Hallaq and Toelle, 2007, Vol. 1: 33] is thus associated with two major political periods marked by the ascendancy of non-Arabic influences, respectively the Mamluk and Ottoman eras. The revival of Arabic literature would thus take place in the 19th century through the rediscovery and updating of heritage prior to the *inḥiṭāt*, thanks to the movement known as *ihyāʾ* (resurrection, revivification), and borrowings from European cultures, by a process identified as *iqtibās* (loan). This narrative suggests the encounter of two great civilizations, one European, then at its peak, the other, Arab, for whom this cultural encounter would restore the tenth century light of the Caliphate. In this narrative, Ottoman culture was an interloper, and a burden to be shed in order to enter into modernity.

It should not be surprising then, that the point of departure between Ottomanity and Arabism should be located upstream, in the 18th century, often represented as being the darkest century in the history of this literature,¹ where Arab culture, at the height of decay, meets the beginning of Ottoman decadence, having irretrievably abandoned the height of Ottoman cultural achievement. Indeed, the narrative of a modern renaissance dovetailed in many ways with the “paradigm of decline” of the Ottoman Empire. A corollary factor in producing the “sick man of Europe”, this paradigm postulates that the Ottoman Empire, after a period of conquest and military exploits in the 16th and 17th centuries, found itself overtaken by European technological advances with which it could no longer compete thus initiating the long slow decline of the 18th century. The Ottoman Empire would thus have crumbled from within, saddled with burdensome Islamic traditions and an administration riddled with corruption and incapable of modernization. The rout of 1918 and the end of the Empire were in this sense only the expression of a natural and expected end.

Ottoman thinkers and bureaucrats as early as the 17th century were preoccupied with the prospect of their eventual decline, as suggested by early Ottoman comments of Ibn Khaldun on the rise and decline of civilizations (Fleischer, 1983), a reading that was updated and adapted in the mid-twentieth century to the needs of post-Ottoman historiography, particularly in the works of Bernard Lewis (1961 & 1962), but also by H.A.R. Gibb and H. Bowen (1957). The paradigm of decline long dominated both Turkish and Arab nationalist, but also Western historiography (see for example Hobsbawm, 1991), and persists in some historical representations of the region. For example, in the issue of the editorial collection *Que sais-je ?* devoted to Islam, published by *Presses Universitaires de France*, the “decadence” of the Empire, set in the eighteenth century, unfolded over the course of the next centuries until the “sick man” finally succumbed to the “decline and progressive fragmentation of the Ottoman Empire”. From its first edition in 1949 to its most recent, 22nd edition of 2009, the Ottoman narrative has remained virtually unchanged.

The question of decline of empire – regardless of which Empire – is nevertheless the subject of a vast historiographical debate. Echoing a comparative reflection on the birth and fall of empires, this historiography highlights both methodological and epistemological problems linked to the often-approximate uses of the category “empire” (Aymes & Dubreuil, 2010; Boilley & Marès, 2012). What do we mean by empire, a multitude of state institutions, territorial conquests, an amalgam of one or more tax systems, the mastery of military technologies, or even empire as the political engine of a civilization or a religion (Grant, 1999; Strauss, 2012;

¹ See the contribution of Hilary Kilpatrick and Farouk Mardam Bey, devoted to the period before *Nahda*, in which 18th century Arabic literature is approached without reference to a by-gone golden age that has never been equaled, but as a literature rooted in a society whose elements we gathered embody a literary sensibility capable of being approached and analyzed as such (Hallaq and Toelle, 207, t1: 33-70).



Reynolds, 2016)? Moreover, knowing that there can be a plurality of rises and falls within one and the same empire, what period(s) are we talking about and through what prism? In the historiography of the Late Roman Empire, for example, the need to examine empire through the prism of Christian institutions has encouraged historians to reconsider traditionally defined chronologies. Indeed, it was just such a reflection that gave birth to the concept of *Late Antiquity* (P. Brown, 1978), which was subsequently reformulated as a fundamental critique of the idea of the *Decline and fall of the Roman Empire* (Gibbon, 1776–1778). Similarly, the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century, admittedly characterized by considerable territorial fragmentation, was able to confirm its hold over provinces far removed from the capital (Istanbul), through implementation of a multitude of reforms intended to modernize state institutions (the *tanzimat*). So, there may have been a decline from one point of view, but a boom from another. In other words, it is necessary to define beforehand the periodization and the unit of analysis relating of the empire in question, before one can understand the consequences of the supposed decline.

The objective here is not to deny the existence of a decline in a given sector or over a defined period, but to guard against the risk of neglect – favored by the postulate of decline – of many moments and historic spaces, especially when the decline in question spans centuries and vast areas. Soraiya Faroqhi thus warns us against the pitfalls of a historiographical blind spot, which would be caused by the paradigm of decline:

The most insidious aspect of such images is probably that everyone assumes that s/he knows what is meant by this term, so that its widespread application preempts all serious research into the processes that were actually going on in the Ottoman Empire [...] (preface in Abou el-Haj, 1991).

Vanessa Van Renterghem's recent social history of Baghdad at the time of the Seljuks - an historical field which until then had been neglected because it was known to be at the height of the Abbasid decline - presents a major criticism of the paradigm. In it, the historian shows the richness of contemporary social, political and intellectual activities, and this *despite the decline* of the Abbasid Empire (2015).

Among the forerunners of the critique of decline in the Ottoman context, Roger Owen in 1976 attacked the civilizational approach adopted by Gibb and Bowen. He wondered whether the decline of the Empire could be reduced solely to its Islamic character, ignoring the rest of the imperial apparatus. A few years later, Reinhard Schulze relayed this criticism, wondering whether historiography, until then focused on the idea of an exclusively European modernity, had not missed an 18th century Islamic Enlightenment (1990). However, it was among historians of the late Ottoman Empire that the debate became best known, beginning in the 1990s. How could one explain the persistence over more than two centuries, and the vast project of the *tanzimat* – over nearly one century – of an empire supposedly in decline?

Emphasizing the “forgetting of an Ottoman modernity” (Oualdi, 2012), historians questioned the Empire’s cogs of modernization during the 19th century, like other empires in the same period. To do this, they examined Ottoman expressions of modernity in the Middle East, such as colonialism, Orientalism and the development of a public-school system, as well as the effects of this modernity on various provinces of the Empire. (Deringil, 2003; Makdissi, 2002; Somel, 2001; Fortna, 2011; Provence, 2011 and Watenpaugh, 2006). Renée Worringer has also shown how a detour through Japan during the Meiji era, allowed many Ottoman officials and members of the CUP to conceive imperial modernity as an alternative to European values and standards, and this to the point of assimilating the Ottoman Empire after the revolution of 1908 as a “Japan of the Middle East” (2004). While until then, “modernity as a global social fact seemed radically foreign to the Ottoman Empire”, an *Ottoman turn* was now transforming the historiography of both the modern and contemporary periods of the Empire (Alleaume, 2010 ; see also Faroqhi, 2010). Revisited by opening the field to the Ottoman context, the *Nahda* period also gave rise to new discussions, revealing in particular the support of many “Nahdawis” for the authority of the Sultan or the Young Turks (Abu Manneh, 1980 ; Philipps, 2016; Hanssen & Weiss, 2016 & 2018; El-Ariss, 2018). This turning point is felt even in the periodizations chosen for studies relating to the contemporary period, so as to include certain key moments from the imperial point of view, such as the revolution of 1908 (for example Dakhli, 2009; Schlaepfer, 2016). Among the many reasons for this turning point, Dina Khoury notably mentions the desire to challenge the model of oriental despotism in the wake of post-colonial studies (2010; see also Göçek, 2012). In short, taking an interest in Ottoman modernities participates more generally in an effort to *provincialize* European modernities (Chakrabarty, 2000).

Empire after empire

The ghost-event between ruptures and continuities

From the point of view of supporters of the decline, the break with the Ottoman Empire seemed relatively easy and natural, since it was based on the assumption that the traces of the empire had, in any case, long since disappeared at the time of its dissolution. On the other hand, for those who questioned this decline by emphasizing the efforts to modernize the Empire, it became crucial to focus on the transition from Empire to National State by focusing on the complex transformation processes and what, potentially, might remain from *the empire after the Empire*. L. Carl Brown states in this regard: “To imply that ideas and institutions developed over centuries, indeed over millennia, could so readily disappear comes dangerously close to accepting that the only really dynamic variable in the modern history of this part of the world has been the impact of the West on the non-Western world (1996: 7).”



This historiographical debate on the ruptures and continuities of empires is reminiscent of the context of the end of the Cold War and the burning question of the *End of History*. The fall of the Berlin Wall, as argued the American historian Francis Fukuyama in 1992 in an essay of the same title later expanded to a monograph, not only heralded the end of socialism, but also confirmed the universal legitimacy of the neo-liberal democratic order. The end of history signified the culmination of a political and ideological quest, since humanity, according to him, had reached the not only final but above all ideal form of governance. Adamantly opposed to this reading, Jacques Derrida reacted a few months later with an essay in which he responded with a metaphor spun around the figure of the ghost. His *Specters of Marx* (1993) indeed served him to demonstrate that humanity was not witnessing the end of history in the sense proposed by Fukuyama: the Western world should, on the contrary, be wary of a specter which, according to him, would continue to haunt public discourse for a long time - that of communism. Wouldn't the discussion on post-Ottoman spaces be – in a way analogous to the decade of ghosts, the 1990s (Cusset, 2020) – also caught in a vice between the illusion of a total rupture, like an *end of the imperial history*, and the “haunting” of a past that does not pass (Conan and Rouso, 1994)?

From our point of view, raising the importance of the *ghosts of the Empire* does not mean choosing to neglect the breaks in favor of continuities which would be considered as immutable persistence, continuing in a linear and natural way long after the fall of the Empire. When, in the context of the impending invasion of Iraq by American troops in 2003, journalist and historian David Fromkin warned George W. Bush against the spectral threat of the Ottoman Empire – and therefore of Islam – in an article entitled “A World Still Haunted by Ottoman Ghosts”, he was assuming that an Islamic worldview (*Weltanschauung*) may have persisted, unchecked, until the beginning of the 21st century, despite various attempts to make it disappear (*New York Times*, March 9, 2003). In our project, on the contrary, it is about considering continuities as persistent recurrences updated with respect to their meanings. Like any historical object, ghosts require contextualization, and it is precisely this that has prompted geographers and anthropologists to rethink the question of the ghost as an *event* which deserves to be examined according to its own mode of existence (Deleuze, 1969). It is not a question of determining whether ghosts actually embody what they represent, but of exploring what they tell us about the societies in which they “appear” and – more particularly for geographers – about the spaces in which they appear (Delaplace, 2018; Barthe-Deloizy et al., 2018). There is therefore, in continuity itself a form of rupture since the present in which the ghosts appear necessarily differs from the past from which they arise. Since ghosts speak of the past just as they speaks of the present, the ghost-events that we examine in this issue of the *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée* (REMMM) are at the same time, expressions of discontinuities as much as of continuities in moments of important transition. Like the living dead – in that they are both dead *and* alive – ghosts must first die before they can

be resurrected in a new form or defined by a new mode of existence. It is with this idea of the ambivalence between disruption and continuity that we propose our contribution to “post-Ottoman” studies now widespread in the international academic field.

Ottoman Footprints and Social Order

From the point of view of social history, we first propose to question the notion of social order and its implications. Considering the notion of multiple “Ottoman heritages” we must insist on the elements attesting the persistence of this social order, and therefore on the continuities despite the self-evident discontinuities among post-Ottoman spaces. How could we not be surprised by the persistence of hierarchical social organization, especially after the demographic social engineering which accompanied the founding of new States (Sigalas & Toumarkine, 2008)?

The difficulty lies in identifying the traces, and in particular the words. Nominalism has many pitfalls. It is hardly necessary to insist on the sustainability of social categories with their adaptive but always hierarchical content. We may cite the *muhtar / mukhtār*—an intermediary between the district or local community and the authorities, elected or appointed until this day in Turkey and across the Levant (Baer 1980; Büssow, 2011: 73-75; Massicard, 2019)—, *qabaday*—a highly masculinized figure of neighborhood gang leader, at once an independent, criminal and honorable figure, romanticized in the Arab Levant as a resistant to the colonial order (Khoury, 2006)—, *damad* (son-in-law), used as an honorary title for the sultan’s son-in-law (Bouquet, 2008; Dumas, 2013; Bouquet, 2015), and as such, a figure among the political elites of the interwar period in the mandates (Khoury, 1987: 197-198) and other *hanedan* (members of the Ottoman imperial family, the object of renewed reverence in present day Turkey (Senyücel, 2009; Woronzow, 2016). This persistence of words bears the signature of the old Ottoman world. It is sustained by a project nourished by the colonial powers in the Middle East, which is to minimize social changes brought about by their domination. The co-optation of traditional elites into new political structures was a testimony to this. Nowhere, however, did this tendency to preserve certain traditional social categories apply so sharply as when the Turkish republican regime assumed a revolutionary policy and linguistic approach. Would not a search for continuity among the foundations of the Ottoman social order, constitute sufficient admission of a political fact—namely, that the legitimacy of the State and of collective perceptions, endlessly contested, internalized, and reproduced and transmitted as social norms form the corpus of the State? The end of the Ottoman Empire, by sending the dynasty of rulers into exile seems to have removed the dynastic link to the “circle of justice” which, according to traditional Ottoman political conceptions, was a guarantee of internal peace and prosperity when the obligations of each element of society was respected, from the mass of workers and taxpayers, through the state institutions



maintaining order, to the sultan, who must, in turn be the guarantor of justice for his people. Without the dynastic link that held it together (Hallaq, 2009: 72-82; Darling, 2013: 152-210), the social order's very existence and preservation after the end of the Ottoman Empire were no longer effective. Social order cannot function even by the intervention of individual actors, but finds itself limited to an endless repetition of social scenarios and enduring normative figures, without any more depth than the characters of Karagöz associated for the most part with the State: the *memur*, the *jandarma*, the *zabita*, etc. These figures remind one of the distinction made by Gilles Deleuze between "image-time", which freezes time to an instant, and "image-movement", which on the contrary renders, through a procession of images, the evanescent object in the frame (Deleuze, 1983; Deleuze, 1985).

A social order is a reconstruction from scattered traces, achieved at the cost of reductions and simplifications. Contrary to this tendency, examination of the notion of social order leads to rationalization and a search for irregularities or discrete figures from which to reconstitute other historical continuities. Such an approach implies considering the social order less as an illusion than as a problematic real-life situation. The point here is not to be excessively Heraclitean. Socio-economic permanence – properties, customs and social uses – in the Ottoman Empire flourished in plain sight, especially when we focus on the massive spaces that remain out of the field of vision when one focuses exclusively on the social order, namely social and demographic absences of an economic and human nature engendered by the ethnic cleansings and mass abuses of the period between 1912 and 1925. We suggest a review of the Ottoman social order in the light of its afterglow, substituting for it a consistent Ottoman frame of reference in contemporary social relations. Common references to the Ottoman period often have little to do with the Ottoman Empire proper, and everything to do with its political posterity. By inferring continuity, are we asserting (and identifying) structural factors valid during the Ottoman era, or are we mainly talking about successive regimes who only pretended to break with Ottoman heritage?

To such an extent, we suggest that the perception of continuities in the social order was reinforced by the hegemonic adoption of the theory of modernization by a sociological discipline in the process of institutionalization (Schayegh, 2015). Nurtured throughout the Middle East during the 1920s under the influence of international philanthropy and popularized after 1945, the theories of modernization have this in common that they identify two main classes, one popular and mainly rural, seen as under-qualified, under-productive, and unable to escape socio-economic practices endorsed by tradition; and the other, middle or upper class, educated, massively urban, destined to lead development but in doing so, to pull the other class forward in history. The traditional world and the Ottoman world then become implicitly conflated. Continuities are then no longer lexical, but functional: it is tempting to see in the dichotomous conceptual tools of modernization and development and in particular in words such as *takhalluf* (backwardness, and by extension underdevelopment (Zakarya, 1990; Basha, 1992)) the equivalent of

categories identified in the Ottoman era by independent nationalist regimes: in the aforementioned case, that of *juhhāl*, “ignorant” popular classes (Makdisi, 2000: 28-50). The modernizing perspective has been inclined to level out the efforts made during the Ottoman period to reflect on social complexity, following the example of the social reform movements that survived Ottoman domination and colonization (Roussillon, 1995). This perspective was able to transform the counter-memories of the Ottoman past created after the Ottoman era into instruments of protest against modernization policies, for example by assimilating experts with the *effendi* of former times, and traditional peasants’ cunning figures with the wisdom of Juḥā/ Nasreddin Hoca. Is this a staging of social complexity against the modernizing work of reduction, or is the pathway through Ottoman memory used to invert sociological patterns term by term?

A similar observation can be made about history, at least about the social uses of history: beyond the staging, through provocation or pastiche, costume or writing, of “Ottomanisms”, which have more to do with political or cultural phenomena than social history, social imaginaries capture the Ottoman past to express it in the present. With what referents, and for what purposes? Popular interest in the Ottoman imperial family which has been rising in Turkey over the past fifteen years together with the feeling that “Noblesse oblige”, is nothing really new, as expressed in Elizabeth Bishop’s article in this issue. The gap between the social position of its members, whether librarians and translators (Beyazid Osman Osmanoğlu, pretender to the throne until his death in 2017), novelists (Kenizé Mourad), jewelry designers and interior designers (Nilhan Osmanoğlu) or stand-up actors (Naz Osmanoglu), and the imaginaries surrounding an imperial family modeled after the handling of European royal families in the tabloid press, has never been so obvious as when the name Osmanoğlu / Osmanoglu² was tarnished by the economic claims of one of its members. Nilhan Osmanoglu recently epitomized such a gap. In 2017, she made the headlines by claiming the restitution of property seized by the Republican regime. A descendant of Abdülhamid II, she had made herself known for her overt stances in favor of the presidential system sought by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Citing a decision of the European Court of Human Rights relating to the spoliations suffered by her family, she claimed ownership of the small island of Galatasaray, located just opposite the shores of the upscale district of Arnavutköy. She was the subject of scathing criticism, which went far beyond the “republican camp”, and revealed the limits of Ottoman nostalgia among the contemporary Turkish public (Ekşi Sözlük, 2017).

One must be careful, however, not to narrow these social uses of the Ottoman past down to elite and nostalgic imaginaries: they can also express themselves dissentingly to illustrate very active phenomena of marginalization or ethno-social marginalization, either by referring to the timeless, Ottoman timeless *Karagöz*

² Among the members of the House of Osman, descendants of Ottoman sultans exiled at the founding of the Republic of Turkey, some retained the Turkish spellings, others adopted Latin spellings.



figures, or by producing a historical counter-narrative in the name of an ethno-class, like the Alevi protests against the name of Yavuz Sultan Selim given to the third bridge over the Bosphorus (Gazete Duvar, 2016). Protest against the attitude of public authorities by invoking continuity since the Ottoman period is another way of appropriating the Ottoman period: in this sense, current expressions of anti-Ottomanism remain Ottomanisms, by invoking a counter-memory and popular Ottomanity. If anti-Ottomanism is a constitutive part of Balkan national historiographies, it creates, apart from official historiographies, a strategy for giving very current demands a structural justification, based on the fact that it is long-term. Therefore it makes it possible to form social groups around an historically founded claim and an awareness, like populations of African origin in Turkey or Palestine, who reconstructed a common history based on the Ottoman slave trade to bring to light the present discriminations they are commonly subjected to (Olpak, 2013; Özdemir, 2014; Qous, 2017). The present social relationships transform the Ottoman past, either by creating contrasting Edenic imaginaries or by relying on a critical historical approach to protest.

A similar reflection should be conducted on the subject of gender lines: these are constantly re-founded on present social relations but often constructed from historical objects and discourses, some of which are more specifically tied to the Ottoman past, as shown by Fabio Giomi and Ece Zerman about the Balkans and Asia Minor (2018). If the construction of Ottoman harems was the subject of a massive and legitimizing historiography for the republican regime in Turkey, the feminist historiography of the Ottoman Empire, for example relating to reproductive rights (Balsoy, 2013) was an instrument used by social movements opposed to public policies claiming to comply with tradition (Atabilen, 2016). Similar intuitions may be followed about the environmental history of Ottoman societies, but in this field the spadework is only beginning: thus the webzine www.jadaliyya.com recently set up a platform (*Jadaliyya Environment Page*) intended for reflection on environmental issues in the Middle East, which quickly opened up to male and female historians.

The common point between these different approaches is that they are associated with social movements built against post-Ottoman socio-political organizations driven both by a nationalist will to modernize while preserving tradition and an axiology giving meaning to the latter. This will, while fundamentally contradictory, has directed the public discourse on the Ottoman past, and as a result, it infuses the counter-stories and the displaced, dissenting social uses of history, which give a changing image of past societies and the Ottoman Empire, according to the challenges of the present. This results in very contrasting occurrences of the Ottoman reference. On one end of the spectrum, the assertion of a “moral economy” challenging the present order in the name of tradition and notions of justice inscribed in the past rather than in a teleology of progress (Thompson, 2015: 251-329) generated a discourse on tolerance within an Islamic political context in some conservative regions in Turkey, with the purpose of supporting the policy of

hosting Syrian refugees and opposing the exclusive and homogenizing tendencies of the republican regime. At the other end of the spectrum, radical revisionist interpretations assimilating the long term to the production of social structures have led to the presentation in public discourse of certain social injustices, particularly in family law, in continuity, even inertia, since the Ottoman period which is implicitly accused of having weighed down these phenomena.

Between amnesia and nostalgia for the Empire. The founder paradigm of the post-Ottoman Middle East in question

Along the same lines, the question of memory - as a dynamic phenomenon - is also raised and reflected in the various contributions to this issue. The abundant literature on *Lieux de mémoire* and the social function of *collective memories*, since the monumental works of Maurice Halbwachs and Pierre Nora among others (1950; 1984-1992), has shown that memory results from a selective process of active and controlled “domestication” (Lowenthal 1996) of the past. In this respect, this control retains a privileged link with the values and concerns of the present, even if it carries elements from the past. Therefore, highlighting the plurality of the persistence and claims of Ottomanity(ies), is also reexamining the testimonies on the imperial past as privileged “insights into the contemporary social context of (their) production” (Abou el-Haj 1982), and thereby revisiting a period well known by historians with a new eye - that of memory. If we extend the reasoning even further, the past, when it is revived, retained, or erased by memory, can even constitute a “mask for innovation” to quote Eric Hobsbawm (1972).

Reflection on Ottoman imprints or memories of the Ottoman Empire in post-Ottoman spaces is not an entirely new process. In-depth reflection has indeed developed, often from a comparative perspective between the former provinces of the Empire (L. Brown, 1996; Yilmaz & Yosmaoğlu, 2008; Mills, Reilly & Philliou, 2011; Ginio & Kaser, 2013; Anastassiadou, 2015). To date, researchers have roughly identified two post-Ottoman memorial moments. According to the narratives produced by the young nationalisms of the period directly following the fall of the Empire, Turks and Arabs had successfully fought against the tyranny and religious obscurantism of the former Hamidian regime. Modernity was therefore built against - and despite - the Ottomans. The images describing this first post-Ottoman memorial period are many. Among researchers: they speak of a vast plot “to erase the Ottoman genealogy” of modern States (Provence, 2011), and a desire to “erase the traces” of the past (Anastassiadou, 2015), of a form of collective “amnesia” of the Empire (Fortna, 2011) or of a “heritage without heirs” (Kolovos, 2015). This trend to oblivion marked the golden age of Turkish and Arab nationalism, before gradually fading from memory, beginning in the 1970s. In the Arab world, the shock of Nasser’s defeat against Israel in 1967 (the *Naksa*)



symbolically marked the beginning of the decline of the dominant nationalist ideology (Ajami, 1981; Carré, 1993; Dawisha, 2003), and seen from Turkey, the coming to power of the AKP in the early 2000s institutionalized the Islamic turning point - which had already taken place in certain circles decades earlier (Copeaux, 1997; Yavuz, 2020). The progressive decline of these nationalisms benefited mainly the various expressions of political Islam, and gave rise to an “Islamicizing-revisionist” discourse (Reinkowski, 1999) predominant in AKP Turkey where it is often described as “Neo-Ottomanist”, as well as in other regimes based on Islamist models of society. It aims at rehabilitating the Ottomans, in particular the era of pan-Islamism of Abdülhamid II, now seen as the defender of Muslims against European colonial ambitions (Deringil, 1998). A form of historical amnesia may well have been replaced by a form of imperial nostalgia.

The distinction between two temporalities – one nationalist and anti-Ottoman, the other Islamist and pro-Ottoman, frequently called “neo-Ottomanist” – refers to what Yoav Di-Capua calls the “founder paradigm” of the regime of historicity traditionally recognized for nationalism(s) in the Middle East, Arab in particular (2009; see also Hartog, 2003), that is nationalist in the first half of the 20th century, Islamist in the second. In this respect, one could define these memory temporalities as “episodes” which, within the meaning understood by Mansoor Moaddel, are defined as periods of ideological production more or less brief and interrupted by important breaks; coups d’état, popular revolts, or other major regional political events. After each rupture, the ideological episode is reconstructed in opposition to the previous one but with the same logic (2005). Therefore, on the memory of the Ottoman Empire, there may be two post-imperial *episodes*: a first episode striving to impose oblivion and a second rehabilitating it. Without challenging historiographical knowledge, this issue believes that a discussion about these two episodes identified by historiography - between a nationalist era which is generally “anti-Ottoman” and a “neo-Ottomanist” Islamicizing-revisionist era – should be had again in order to refine the categories of analysis, by multiplying the perspectives and by focusing on what remained in the shadow of these two episodes.

Observing the evolution of representations of the Empire in literary and more generally artistic production during the twentieth century and early twenty-first century may offer avenues to explore the subject in a more nuanced manner. The paradigm of amnesia does indeed appear early in Arabic literature, not through the disappearance of Ottoman elements but through a controlled memorial discourse. The pioneering work of Jurjī Zaydān, author of the very pejorative notion of *inḥitāṭ* mentioned earlier is one of its founding texts. In the midst of his project to write a series of educational novels on the history of Islam, Zaydān, as early as 1911, devoted a novel to the Young Turk Revolution. Under the title *al-Inqilāb al-‘uthmānī* (*The Ottoman Revolution*),³ the events of his novel take place under

3 Depending on the readings made of Zaydān’s intentions, this novel is either considered a part of his historical-educational novels or as a “break” in the project, imposed by historical events (Ben Lagha, in

Abdülhamid II, between 1907 and 1908, and portray a binary world divided between corrupt despotism epitomized by the vacillating old order of the Sublime Porte and freedom embodied by young Turkish militants who would eventually triumph. While Zaydān's work had appeared as contemporary, even activist, it became part of history barely three decades later, not because the events cited had become distant in time, but because the world to which they referred was already bygone or, more specifically considered as such. Thus, *al-Raghīf*⁴ by Tawfiq Yūsuf 'Awwād (d. 1989), considered to be the first Arabic novel dealing with the First World War, resurrected in 1939 this near / distant past on the theme of famine, persecution and death, and endorsed the mechanism of "amnesia through mastered memory" which would later largely dominate Arab literary production focused on the Ottoman world.

Between amnesia and nostalgia, a process was taking place at a varying pace in the former Arabic-speaking provinces, now a group of independent neighbor countries. Even if these countries were able to initially maintain the common rejecting position that we have just mentioned, based on a new national feeling, their relationship with Ottomanity did not evolve homogeneously and was strongly influenced by geopolitical factors ranging from the indirect repercussions of the Cold War on Eastern Arab intellectuals, to the political relations that one Arab regime or another maintained directly with the Turkish government. The paradigm initiated by Zaydān in Egypt and extended to Lebanon by 'Awwād did not recognize the Mandate borders and infiltrated all Eastern Arab literature. But while the *Naksa* in 1967 marked a symbolic tipping point in the perception of the Ottoman world and its presumed traditionalism, the theme of the Sick Man gained new success in Syria at the end of the past century, at a time when egalitarian and anti-imperialist struggles were faced with a global failure represented by the collapse of the Socialist Bloc. Syrian novelists such as Nihād Sīrīs (*Riyāḥ al-shamāl*; Vent du nord, 1989) or Nabīl Sulaymān (*Madārāt al-sharq - al-Ashri'a*; *Les orbites d'Orient - Les voiles*, 1990) then plunged back into a past that had been set aside in the 1960s and 1970s devoted to a large extent to contemporary issues. Others followed in the 2000s, still fascinated by the twilight moment preceding the collapse of the Empire, such as Mamdūḥ 'Adwān (d. 2004) who, in his novel bearing the eloquently ambiguous title of *A'dā'i* (*My enemies*, 2000), introduced as his central character none other than Ahmed Djemal Pasha (d. 1922), governor of Syria and commander of the 4th Ottoman Army, whose brief statesmanship in Damascus between 1915 and 1917 earned him posterity in Syrian and Lebanese school books and made him the anti-hero of the rebirth of an Arab nation.

The 10-year war in Syria has not chased off the Ottoman ghost, quite the opposite. The horrors suffered have brought back the horrors of the past into present

Hallaq and Toelle , 2007: 210). This novel was translated early into French (1924) under the title of *Allah veuille! ... Roman de la révolution ottomane* (See Bîtâr and Sandre, 1924).

4 Literally: The flatbread. Translated late and published in 2015 by Actes-Sud under the title, *Le Pain*.



times, sometimes as memories, sometimes as an explanation of the present, perhaps as consolation through the idea that atrocity is timeless. In *al-Iṣbaʿ al-sādisa* (*Le sixième doigt*, 2012) by Khayrī al-Dhahabī, the account of the military and intellectual confrontation between the ambitious Ibrahim Pasha’s Egypt and Constantinople stems from a nightmarish scene where the bodies of crippled children, slaughtered by a barber-healer in the 19th century, are unearthed from their mass grave by packs of hyenas. Elsewhere, the memory does not emerge from the earth; it falls from the sky when the images of the killings of 1860 in Damascus burst in the narrator’s family memory in *ʿAṭṭār al-qulūb* (*Le parfumeur des coeurs*, 2014) by Muḥammad Burhān, at the very moment when the bombs rain on his neighborhood in the same city, a century and a half later.

Turkey’s involvement in the Syrian conflict has undoubtedly contributed to this heightened re-emergence; indeed the official Turkish discourse has alluded since the beginning of the conflict to a “historic duty” towards the Syrians for whom the Ottomanity claimed by the AKP now has a contemporary dimension, whether they adhere to the discourse or whether they oppose it. However, the intertwining of art and geopolitics and the ghosts arising from it do not begin with the flow of Syrian refugees fleeing to the Turkish border to avoid the fighting, nor with Turkophile fighters advancing in the other direction. We keep in mind the cult series *Ukhwat al-Turāb* (*Brothers of the Earth*, 1996, *al-Shām al-Duwaliyya*) on the Arab Revolt. In the midst of a crisis both over Syrian support for the PKK and over sharing the waters of the Euphrates, this series infuriated Turkish diplomacy after the broadcast of the long scene of impalement. This scene and the tension that followed gave rise to a line that has become notorious for generations of Syrians: “*Kill shī illā l-khāzū yā sīdī!*”, “Anything but impalement, Sir!”)

While its effect has not been as long as that of novels, the small screen has indeed accentuated this paradigm and brought the ghosts to life on a wide scale. Yet, soap operas like *Brothers of the Earth* focusing on the anti-Ottoman struggle in early 20th century where the Ottoman world is directly staged, do not measure up to Turkish melodramatic soap operas of the 2000’s, dubbed in Arabic, which deserve special attention. Admittedly, anti-Ottomanism is a form of Ottomanism, as mentioned earlier, but what happens when, in a country like Syria that has built its national narrative on a supposed victory against the Turks, those same Turks become, for a time, mere attractive neighbors, without regard to the past?

Thomas Richard’s article in this issue shows that the importance of this phenomenon is not so much its representation of nostalgia for the Ottoman world as it is the fact that it goes beyond this paradigm. The economic content of the phenomenon should undoubtedly be taken into consideration (Gonzalez-Quijano, 2018)⁵. In 2018, the Arab market absorbed 15% of Turkish production in television series, not counting the indirect benefits in terms of tourism. The importance of

5 “The series, punching balls of the Saudi media” [<https://cpa.hypotheses.org/6547>]

the economic factor, however, continues to hide the anthropological and linguistic aspect of the phenomenon. Indeed, Turkish production has successfully entered the Arab market by making use of the dazzling success of Syrian soap operas in the 1990s. Nurtured by generations of actors graduated from a high-performance, very active Dramatic Arts Institute, and sponsored by private producers like *al-Shām al-Duwaliyya* mentioned earlier, owned by a high dignitary of the Baath party, the former Syrian vice-president ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Khaddām (d. 2020), until his defection in 2005, Syrian soap operas had finally managed to compete with the reigning Egyptian series and to share in the large budgets of Gulf countries’ producers. What’s more, regardless of the social phenomenon characterized by these dubbed soap operas at the end of the 2000s (Gonzalez-Quijano, 2008),⁶ watching the stars of Turkish television address all Arabs in the Syrian dialect was not without meaning. The commercial purpose was obvious, the names and voices of the stars of Syrian series were indeed a selling point. Turkish producers and Arab distributors could count on this dialect to penetrate a market anchored in its own patterns, passions, and whims. But the linguistic choice was far from being limited to these commercial aspects. It coincides with the short honeymoon between the Damascus and Ankara regimes, introduced by a security agreement in 1998 and crowned in 2004 by the signing of a free trade agreement. While the “common past” was now finding its place in the official Syrian discourse, the small screen Turkish actors no longer had the features of a Djamel Pasha joyfully shouting “çok güzel”, in *Brothers of the Earth*, in front of the hanged bodies of Arab nationalist activists in Damascus. Today the disarming smile of Tuba Büyüküstün, featured in *Çemberimde Gül Oya*, translated into Arabic as *Iklil al-ward (The Rose and the Thorn, 2007)*,⁷ the first Turkish series dubbed in Arabic, and in *Ihlamurlar Altında (Under the Linden Trees, 2008)*, renamed *Sanawāt al-ḡayā’* then *Asi (2009)*, is what captures the attention of millions of viewers and more specifically female viewers for dozens of hours.

In this ever-prosperous high-flying business, while politicians and merchants could more or less know their places and their objectives, where do those who make these series and those who consume them stand? The dubbed series are a rare space where the Arabic language is symbolically allowed to invade the Turkish space and rename its objects. At the same time, it is a space where a new Turkishness invites itself with ease into the daily lives of Arabs and modifies their tastes, their fantasies and even their hairstyle (Gonzalez-Quijano, 2008). In these new roles played systematically by both a Turkish actor and a Syrian actor, who, of the face or the voice, is the other’s reality? Who is the present and who is the past? Who in this substitution game replaces or becomes the other? Is it the handsome Kıvanç Tatlıtuğ who gains in Arabness when the soft-toned voice of Maxime Khalil penetrates him, does the latter’s Arabness vanish behind a handsome Ottoman who learned

⁶ “Turkish passions: a thing for women” [<https://cpa.hypotheses.org/263>]

⁷ Date of the first broadcast in Arabic, applies here and for the following three titles.



the lessons of the past and this time chose to speak the language of his provinces? While they do not speak of the First World War, these endless love stories are highly evocative of ghosts, even if one cannot tell with certainty whose ghost is whose, and if it is difficult to predict the evolution of this powerful image machine which remains at the heart of an increasingly complex geopolitical landscape with unpredictable twists and turns.

The founder paradigm is therefore one interpretation among others, and we should highlight the plurality of narratives, related to multiple discursive strategies in keeping with the various environments of the society in which they take shape (Determann, 2013). Recent news has also widely broadcast the political fluidity of Ottoman references: the announcement by the Turkish government of its decision to convert Hagia Sophia from a national museum into a mosque, a long-standing bone of contention between supporters and opponents of the regime established by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, was ignored by its Republican opponents, even hailed by some (Perugia, 2020). At the same time, one of the most prominent personalities among the opponents competed with the ruling party's efforts to highlight the Ottoman past by acquiring, on behalf of the city of Istanbul, one of three portraits of Sultan Mehmet II produced by the Italian Renaissance (MacDonald, 2020). By failing to take a rejecting position with regard to the Ottoman past, the Republican opposition parties thwart Turkey's internal "culture wars", which have long served the AKP politically, or rather they choose their battles.

First of all, during the first period, nostalgia for Ottomanity(ies) seems to have been expressed as early as the fall of the Empire. In fact, many players had associated the *tanzimat* era with a vast modernist project, in political, educational and social terms, and had therefore interpreted the arrival of the European powers as a regression, undermining the State that was perceived as a driving force of social change. As M'hamed Oualdi's contribution shows, the Ottoman ghost arose in Tunis in the 1880s, while Elizabeth Bishop identified it in Cairo early in the 20th century, and Aline Schlaepfer in Baghdad beginning in the 1920s. Indeed, the will to maintain certain assets acquired under the Empire and threatened by colonial projects may have provoked claims of Ottomanity (ies) *a posteriori* but relatively early. In literature as well, the abundance of Turkish terms and expressions listed and examined by Iyas Hassan in the post-Ottoman Syrian versions of the *Sirat al-Zahir Baibars (Life of al-Zahir Baybars)* cast doubt on the idea of the Empire's sudden amnesia after its fall. Conversely, with regard to the second post-imperial episode, Thomas Richard's article on Turkish audiovisual productions shows that the somewhat simplistic analysis grid of AKP-li neo-Ottomanism must be refined. Productions featuring the Ottomans do not always aim at rehabilitating the Ottomans from a perspective of Islamist *soft power*, it frequently responds to commercial strategies, even to fads. Similarly, the economics of Ottoman heritage brought to light by Juliette Dumas in her detailed analysis of the Istanbul Naval Museum from a visitor's perspective, reveals the mechanisms of a booming tourism sector. Finally, the mirror analysis offered by Candice Raymond of two Beirut

historians shows that the Ottomans' systems of representation can be multiple, during the same period (post-war Lebanon), in the same city, on the same subject and sometimes using the same words – while they refer to different things. In this regard, the various contributions to this issue of *REMMM* on the ghosts of the Ottoman Empire participate in an effort to rethink the 20th century founder paradigm of historicity in the Turkish and Arab Middle East.

One final clarification regarding the title of this volume: why speak of Ottomanity(ies), thus leaving the door open to the plural form? A generational reading grid should be applied to our thinking, since saying and imagining one's Ottomanity – especially when the Empire is no more – varies according to actual historical experiences (1876, 1908, etc.). Elusive and everlasting, ghosts are expressed through generation effects that were never revealed so clearly as when achieved, or alternately through kaleidoscopic sequences of symbols. The Ottoman reference draws here and there in the vocabulary and across linguistic boundaries. It elevates certain images and forms to the rank of types. Thus, an imagined Ottomanity is organized, whose meaning is only fully expressed within cultural and political fields where the instrumental uses of the past are multiplying. The strength of this reference seems to rest in the infinite possibilities and nostalgia to which its reappropriation lends itself.

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