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Ottoman and Turkish Studies in 2023: The Good, the Bad, and the (Un)Likely*

I must start by thanking the organizers, more particularly Yavuz Köse, for bestowing upon me the immense honor of a keynote at this Fourth European Convention on Turkic, Ottoman, and Turkish Studies, known as Turkologentag 2023.

A keynote is generally thought to be a recognition of a person's merit and a reflection of their scholarly contribution to a field; at the very least, it is a recognition of their experience and of the length of time they have been around. A more cynical take would be to assume that a keynote is entrusted to a person from whom you no longer expect any novel or original work, but maybe at best a synthesis and some words of wisdom. Moreover, one can never exclude the possibility that one or several colleagues of greater renown or age, or both, have declined the invitation, or that they just could not make it. One may even simply be the last surviving specimen still capable of speaking and standing, preferably both at the same time. To paraphrase the title of BoJack Horseman's heartbreaking final episode, 'It's nice while it lasts.'

I have no intention of speculating on the question of which of these highly objective criteria best describes my situation. I can only say that if one is to consider the beginning of doctoral studies to be the starting point of an academic career, I have now been in the field for exactly forty years, doing research, writing, teaching, and supervising. Based on this simple and factual observation, I have decided that I would share with you some of my wisdom based on this experience.

I hope the title of this talk will give you a sense of what my overall plan is. First, obviously, to find a witty reference to a universally recognizable element of our culture. Of course, some would have gone for a more sober and descriptive title; I tend to favor humor over description, as I believe that in our domain, we already have too much of the latter, and too little of the former.

The reference to the good and the bad is rather self-evident. By using this somewhat Manichaean dichotomy, I mean to propose a sort of balance sheet, albeit personal and subjective, of approximately five decades of scholarship and research in the field of Turkic, Ottoman, and Turkish studies, with an inevitable – and I hope forgivable – stress on the Ottoman component. The 'likely' that follows is meant to conclude with

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a discussion of the possible ways in which this field may develop in the near future. The parenthetical '(un)' that precedes it is not just a cheap attempt to echo the prosody of Sergio Leone's iconic movie title; rather, it is a timid effort to suggest that this future may be somewhat grimmer and bleaker than we would hope, and that many opportunities that may come to mind could well be offset by serious obstacles and potentially negative developments lurking in the dark.

I belong to a generation of historians conscious of the progress that has been made in these past decades and of the gains that have resulted. At the risk of oversimplification, I would say that the 1980s proved to be a period of methodological breakthroughs; that the 1990s were the time of a disciplinary epiphany; and that the first decade of the new millennium brought an ideological catharsis. Focusing on my own area of experience and expertise, Ottoman history, I can safely say that we have come a long way. From a rather marginal and insulated field that rarely received any attention from the outside world, we have managed to open several avenues of integration and conversation with other areas and disciplines. The very limited literature we had to rely upon before the 1980s has today grown out of proportion, making it difficult to even follow the mass of scholarship that is being produced. The compartmentalization that used to characterize Ottoman, and for that matter, Turkish, studies has greatly disappeared, and it is now replaced by a much more fluid environment that blurs the boundaries of former disciplinary fiefdoms. Scholars in the field now know that political history can feed on architecture; that law is often at the foundation of economic realities; that religion may inform artistic production; that material culture can become an alternative source of documentation; or that there is no sense in dismissing literary sources as potentially subjective. We may still be far from an ideal situation, but there is little doubt that things have moved very rapidly and rather decisively in the right direction.

As a historian who works and teaches mostly in Turkey, I find it particularly important that much of this progress should have taken place in this country, once a backwater of critical and innovative history. The list would be long of the encouraging signs we have witnessed in the past two or three decades. The traditionally powerful vision of the Ottoman Empire as a *sui generis* and unique historical formation has been replaced by solid attempts at reconsidering the topic in a variety of comparative perspectives. Likewise, the marginalization, if not the neglect altogether, of all forms of peripheries – political, geographic, ethnic, religious, gendered, social, cultural – that for decades has dominated the Turkish mode of dealing with Ottoman history has been challenged in many ways, by a number of scholars and researchers willing and able to look at sources other than the central records of the imperial bureaucracy, to use languages other than Turkish to conduct their research, to study the provinces without having to look at them from the capital, and to seek ways of circumventing and avoiding the traps laid by the imperial rhetoric and ideology.

At a conceptual level, one is amazed at the level of sophistication reached by some of the historiographical production today, with respect to new approaches, theoretical frameworks, and methodological tools, many of which are now on par with some of the best work being produced by Western scholarship. Finally, how can one not

acknowledge the very remarkable way in which some of the most deeply rooted taboos have, if not fallen, at least been seriously challenged, making it possible, for example, to speak about Kurds in Ottoman history, or about the Armenian genocide? In fact, let me move one step beyond and suggest that perhaps the most encouraging sign of the past few decades may well be the fact that some Turkish students are *not* doing Ottoman or Turkish history, and that they are now venturing along the formerly inaccessible paths of Western, American, Asian, European, African, or world history.

The conference that brings us together speaks of this progress. We may have failed in 1529 and 1683, but this time, it looks like we finally nailed it… More seriously, triggered by my obsessive-compulsive drive to count items, fill Excel® sheets, and draw pie charts, a reminder of how historical research used to be done in the 1980s, I have submitted the program of our meeting to a hasty statistical analysis that reveals some interesting aspects about the state of the art today. I have counted over 700 papers distributed throughout more than 200 sessions and I have attempted to make sense of their distribution in terms of discipline, periodization, and geographical focus. With respect to the last criterion, the Ottoman Empire – widely defined – and Turkey/Anatolia each make up for about one third of the papers, thus adding up to two thirds of the scholarship represented here. This may seem like an overrepresentation, but after all, a rather legitimate one, if we consider the title of the event. What really counts is that the remaining third deals with areas which, only a few decades ago, would have been almost absent from the picture: the Middle East, the Balkans, Central Asia, Europe, the Maghreb… I believe that even the fact that Istanbul adds up to a mere 2 percent is a far cry from the much more prominent place the imperial capital would have claimed back in the good old days.

The main four periods are also well balanced, revealing a positive bias in favor of the Republican era, with a striking preeminence of studies on contemporary events and phenomena. There is no doubt that this feature reflects a widening spectrum; yet, as I will try to suggest later, it may also be an indication of a malaise triggered by the latest political developments in the region, particularly in Turkey. As to the major disciplines and approaches represented, the variety they display is truly encouraging. Some 'classics' remain, such as political history and political science, social history and anthropology, or literature and linguistics. Yet just a cursory glance at the titles of papers in these categories reveals that their focus and approaches have little to do with the way in which such subjects used to be treated forty years ago. 'Cultural studies' may seem to represent the newest dominant trend, but I wouldn't trust this label too much, given that I have used it pretty much every time I failed to find a more appropriate or precise one. One should certainly not dismiss some of the still modest but significant novelties, such as gender studies, environmental studies, legal history, and of course digital humanities. There are unfortunate losers, too, such as economic history, once the apanage of some of the great names in the field, or, rather surprisingly, art and architectural history, which I am truly amazed to see at such a modest level after the golden age it seems to have enjoyed in the past decades.

Of course, these pseudo-statistics are far from giving an accurate snapshot of our trade; yet, they do have the relative merit of giving a sense of a domain that is alive

and well, much in tune with global trends in the humanities and the social sciences. A reassuring feeling that there may be a bright future ahead of us. Personally, when I look back at my own doctoral project on the history of the Levant trade, and I compare it to the topics treated and the issues addressed by young scholars today, I cannot avoid feeling a pang of jealousy and regret. Of course, this is pure anachronism, and the discrepancy between the two is precisely due to the 'great leap forward' between then and now. I find consolation in the realization that I, too, have evolved in time, and that I have managed to venture into domains, subjects, and periods I would not have dreamed of forty, thirty, or even twenty years ago.

There is no real mystery behind this evolution. It is greatly due to an increasingly positive interaction with the Western humanities and social sciences. This interaction can be traced back to the nineteenth century, especially in a West-East direction, but it is really in the past century that it took up speed and started to develop into a form of cross-fertilization. True, this interaction is not perfectly balanced, and the impact is still predominantly felt in the West-East direction rather than the other way around. From the influence of the Annales school to Braudelian thought, from Marxist models to Wallersteinian approaches, and from the history of mentalities to new trends in gender or environmental studies, Turkish and Ottoman studies have been growingly influenced by new breakthroughs in Western scholarship, from theoretical models to novel approaches. I often (half-)jokingly observe that, for a while now, it has become difficult to read a dissertation without coming across references to Foucault, Habermas, Derrida, Bourdieu, or Barthes…

I'll come back to this in a moment. In the meantime, let me add yet another crucial dimension of what I have called 'cross-fertilization,' namely that with a closer circle of regional scholarship, mostly in neighboring countries, successor states or not – Greece, Bulgaria, or of course Israel, for quite a while now – which, combined with the relatively recent but very promising interest that has developed among Turkish scholars for Greek, Armenian, Jewish and other non-Muslim communities, guarantees that yet another breach will be opened in the monolithic treatment the Ottoman Empire has generally received to this day.

Finally, I must underline the fact that the astounding progress achieved in the past decades is also based on a quantitative and qualitative leap in the documentation and analytical tools that have been made available. In the case of history, from dependance on chronicles, *tapu-tahrir* or *mühimme* registers, and on Western archival and other material, we have come to a point where the Ottoman State Archives provide online access to millions of pages of documents of the most diverse nature, a seemingly endless source of inspiration and knowledge for new theses, dissertations, and projects. Most of the 19th and 20th century printed material is now accessible online, as are a growing number of earlier manuscript sources, and I will not even go into the more unorthodox ways in which much of the literature can be accessed on the web. The cherry on the cake is the new digital technologies that help us make an intelligent and efficient use of this unleashed documentary power. For some years now, Lexiqamus®, has been providing students and researchers in Ottoman studies with an online lexicographic tool of unprecedented efficiency. Muteferriqa®, an online search

portal, allows us to word-search practically all the available Ottoman-Turkish printed material, thus bringing a revolutionary new dimension to the documentary mass that has been made available in the past couple of decades.

To quote Voltaire's wise philosopher Pangloss' take on Leibniz, all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds, meaning that despite all this progress, if we scratch the surface, there are still very serious problems and obstacles that need to be handled and addressed. The list being long, I will try to focus on what I consider to be some of the major challenges we are facing and are likely to face in the future. First, let us not kid ourselves into believing that our domains and areas have finally reached the level of international recognition we had been hoping for in the past decades. In most American and European universities, our fields are still generally hosted by departments, centers, or institutes, defined in geographical, religious, cultural, or civilizational, rather than disciplinary, terms. The age-old compartmentalization that sets 'Oriental' studies apart from mainstream Western disciplines still persists, albeit in much less blatant ways. A sense of hierarchy can also still be felt in the limited reciprocity of academic research between the two 'worlds.' I said that I was happy and proud to see young Turkish scholars invest in other domains than the ones that are generally assigned to them; yet their number is still very limited, and certainly inferior to that of Western scholars dealing with things Turkish, Ottoman, Islamic, or Middle Eastern… One step further, it is still possible, especially in history, for Western scholars to engage in 'Oriental' scholarship as long as their reading and paleographic skills are sufficient, without necessarily having to master whatever modern or vernacular languages are related to the domain they study. Wouldn't it be rather surprising to see a scholar from, say, Turkey, being embraced by a French community of historians on the base of top-notch research on, say, eighteenth-century *cahiers de doléances*, but with limited skills when it comes to speaking and communicating in French?

Please do not read any crypto-nationalism or vulgar anti-Orientalism into these observations, for this hierarchical imbalance also stems from weaknesses and expediencies on the side of the assumed victims. I can only speak for Turkey, but I have a feeling the same is true of the wider region. How many Turkish universities can claim that they offer a proper formation in the humanities that might prepare students to compete internationally in domains other than their 'regional strengths'? How many scholars, young and old, have not benefited from the existence of centers and departments devoted to 'area studies' to find a position in Western universities without having to compete against a much larger crowd, had they been subjected to a wider search process, based on disciplinary criteria? How many of us have not, at some point or another, benefited from the quaintness or exoticism of our research, from the fact that it took a courageous stand against some ideological taboo or political pressure in our homeland, or simply from the fact that some of our audiences fall for the apparent complexity of the documentation that we use? What I mean to say is that Orientalism is a two-way street and that 'we' have also found ways of turning it into a comfort zone, a security blanket, thus contributing to keeping it alive.

Nor does our flirtation with Orientalism end at that. By brilliantly exposing this mortal sin of the West, Edward Said has unknowingly opened an avenue for those

who were eager to piggyback this notion in order to promote a much less sophisticated agenda by navigating the murky waters of cheap Third-Worldism and crypto-nationalism. If Orientalism is evil, then all its scholarly production becomes questionable, even outright factually wrong, and it needs simply to be replaced by its opposite, whatever form it may take. Thus, a legitimate and justified critique of blatant ideological distortion can open the path to an uncritical and systematic inversion of most of the arguments put forth by this tainted scholarship, together with some of the purely factual data that can be derived from it. The dangers of this simplistic and often opportunistic attitude are aggravated by the fact that such constructs tend to get the approval of both guilt-ridden Western audiences, who are generally incapable of detecting its methodological flaws, and of openly nationalist historians, only too happy to see some of their arguments legitimized by internationally vetted scholarship.

There are, however, other pernicious effects of Western breakthroughs and of their impact on Turkish, Turkic, and Ottoman studies. The most blatant of these is that they have raised the bar in terms of expectations of novelty and originality regarding the subjects treated. This is evidently a good thing, and one that has greatly contributed and will continue to contribute to the cross-fertilization I mentioned earlier. However, it also comes with a price, which I will tentatively describe as 'putting the cart before the horse.' What I mean by this is that, as Western historiography developed, there has been growing pressure to emulate these achievements and to apply them to our fields. This is true of theoretical models, of *problématiques*, and of methodology. Again, this is not *necessarily* or *essentially* bad, but it is a trend that is fraught with dangers, starting with the temptation to borrow, almost in copy-paste fashion, elements that have been developed in Western historiography or, more generally, in the humanities. The drive behind this, to use an economic metaphor, is comparable to 'technology transfer,' or even to old-fashioned 'import substitution.'

The phenomenon is not new. When Barkan tried to find an Ottoman 'price revolution' and used *tahrir* registers to do demographic history, when Divitçioğlu applied the Asiatic Mode of Production to the Ottoman Empire, when İnalcık wrote about Ottoman capital formation, when historians adapted Frank's dependency theory or Wallerstein's world economy models to their domain, or when Maqdisi first coined the expression 'Ottoman Orientalism,' they were all engaging in the same exercise of transferring state of the art historical 'technology' to be used in their own field. After all, nothing could be more understandable and legitimate than these efforts of 'cross-fertilization.' The phenomenon has increased in intensity in the past decades, to the point of becoming a predominant modus operandi, particularly in Ottoman history.

The risk, however, is that this cross-fertilization may sometimes be missing the 'cross,' and we know that one of the favorite themes of Orientalism is precisely the 'fertilization' of the East by the West. We tend to forget that each of these models were born in the West from questions posed, and from models and theories developed from Western sources and documentation. By resorting to 'shortcuts' that bypass this process and borrow directly from theoretical or methodological 'kits,' we are confronted with two major risks. The first is that, by inverting the normal process

between documentation and theory, we are opening a path to the deadly combination of cherry-picking and wishful thinking, due to the temptation to look for – and most likely find – some cases and documents that fit, and the risk of shunning those that do not. The second danger is that this quest may result in a growing bias for 'edgy' – and possibly marginal – issues, to the detriment of more conventional ones, albeit grounded in more solid and representative documentation.

By and large, I am speaking of an imbalance between the level of sophistication of our tools and models and the documentation at our disposal. We have – rightly – learned to replace 'slave' by 'enslaved person,' but I am not sure we are sufficiently equipped yet to carry out true research on, say, the everyday life of harem inmates. I observed earlier that economic history was underrepresented in our meeting. Could it be because the tedious process it requires does not yield the same rewards and gratification as research done on more 'fashionable' and 'desirable' topics that will draw the attention of a wider audience? Is it not more rewarding to critically and interpretively 'read' – as we like to say today – images, or even just one image, rather than plodding through pages and pages of *defter*s in that horrible *siyakat* script just to obtain a few figures that might feed into one graphic and, at best, one paragraph of text? Does not the system encourage doctoral and postdoctoral candidates to go for topics that are more appealing than more conventional, 'old-school,' analyses?

Anyway, who am I to speak, the pot calling the kettle black, given that I, too, have moved away from near-economic history to plunge into the realms of visual culture, of the history of mentalities, of ego-documents, and of Ottoman Orientalism, always to my greatest delight and enjoyment? It would be naïve to think that we will be able to invent a truly alternative methodology or radically different theoretical models, all the more so if we consider that some of the *problématiques* raised by Western scholarship are undoubtedly of universal character – think of gender, for example – or that they can legitimately be adapted to other cultural contexts. So, to use yet another example of my sayings, I do believe that we should not throw the baby out with the bathwater, and that we should just be cautious about the way in which we conduct our research and posit our arguments. Are we really sure that our research question is relevant to the cultural, temporal, social environment we are targeting? Is there any risk that we might be finding precisely what we set out to search? Might we be missing a whole set of data that would go in a different, or even opposite, direction? Is the data we are using exhaustive, within the limits of possibility, or are the samples we choose representative enough to be trusted to back a solid argument? Have we read the lines before starting to read *between* the lines? When we 'read' images, or any other document, visual or not, are we sure that we are considering all the dimensions of the question, including their diffusion (or not), and their reception (or not), or, to use an economic metaphor, are we looking not just at production, but also at distribution and consumption?

I may have given the impression that I am now well into my discussion of the 'bad' part of my simplistic balance sheet. In fact, not at all. The flaws, weaknesses, and risks I have enumerated here are still part of the 'good' side of the coin, and the signs of a scholarship that is constantly testing new grounds. The temptation of systematic

anti-Orientalism, the tendency to resort to methodological and theoretical models and tools borrowed directly from Western scholarship, or the unavoidable fashion of inspiration from appealing and edgy topics are still part and parcel of good history, and are likely to be corrected, attenuated, levelled out, or just crowded out as our disciplines develop and mature. In reality, what I have described and discussed up to here constitutes the shiny tip of a much darker iceberg. I have said earlier that I was very pleased – I have avoided proud – to observe how much progress had been made in Turkey in the past decades. I should have added, however, that today, for every 'good' dissertation or article produced in the country, one can show scores of 'bad' examples that would statistically crush the former to the level of insignificance.

The reasons for this are numerous and rather obvious. Almost twenty years after I first came up with this catchy phrase, I still stand by my statement that 'Ottoman history needs to be rescued from the Turks.' The problem, of course, is intrinsic to the way in which history has been integrated, especially from the 1930s on, into the very fabric of ideology and politics in Turkey, to be instrumentalized, distorted, and abused to serve allegedly noble purposes, starting with nation building. I do not need to remind you of these constructs and manipulations; what really counts is to realize that what the Kemalist regime invented to serve its own agenda became the blueprint for its opponents' own strategy to resist, counter, and eventually replace the regime's dominant narrative. From the 1950s onwards, on top of being the instrument of Kemalism, history also became the ground on which anti-Kemalist and Islamist ideologies would graft themselves to produce an alternative narrative, which remained to a large extent marginalized until the 1980s, when post-coup politics shifted toward a gradual normalization of political Islam. Forty years later, the transformation is complete, and the Turkish Republic has been successfully and radically redefined through the merging of nationalism and Islamism after two decades of uninterrupted rule of the Justice and Development Party, the AKP, under Erdoğan's charismatic leadership.

Despite obvious resemblances with the Kemalist way of handling history, the novelty today is that this phenomenon has been immensely amplified by the rise of a new type of populism and of the existence of the new media, capable of unleashing an incomparably more powerful message than old-school Kemalism could have ever dreamed of. Yet, beyond just form and diffusion, content has also greatly changed, in that AKPism can now rely on a discourse, which while coopting more traditional forms of nationalism and jingoism, can add an Islamic dimension that appeals to a very considerable proportion of the population, starting with those who, not without reason, consider that they have been wronged, excluded, and even oppressed by decades of 'white' Kemalist supremacy. One needs only to imagine how much easier it is to convince Turkish citizens that only Sunni Muslims are 'real' Turks than to hark back to the nation's alleged Sumerian, Hittite, or even pre-Islamic Central Asian antecedents. Finally, we cannot discard the impact of political stability, or at least continuity, which, in Turkey, seems to have an unfortunate tendency to morph into authoritarianism.

More importantly, perhaps, identities and historical narratives seem to have gained more significance than 'real' social, economic, or political issues, and history has thus

become a strange battleground for competing ideologies harking back to symbolic characters and dates before systematically projecting them into the future, revealing a blatant incapacity to imagine it otherwise than by references to the past. Feeling cornered and faced with an existentialist crisis, Kemalism has little more to offer than trying to outbid the AKP's nationalist stance, together with a desperate recourse to a personality cult that can reach unimaginable levels. One of my personal favorites is the Atatürk-shaped shadow that graces the mountains of Damal between 15 June and 15 July of every year, listed among Ardahan's thirteen cultural and touristic attractions and described as 'one of the most important natural wonders of our province' on the governorate's official site, which would probably have preferred to boast Abdülhamid's profile, but still feels an obligation to pay lip service to the founding ideology of the Republic.

In fact, this flexibility is what makes the new ideology particularly powerful and efficient. It can integrate and appropriate practically anything by creating a historical hodgepodge rendered possible by the combination of opportunism and general ignorance. This is what makes it easy to establish bold connections between the past and the present, such as the series *Payitaht Abdülhamid*, whose title, 'Abdülhamid the capital city,' remains a mystery, and which draws a daring parallel between the 'last great sultan' and Erdoğan himself. The web reveals that one of the actors, playing the role of the palace secretary Tahsin Pasha, ended up becoming a deputy for the AKP, and celebrated this achievement by posting on the platform previously known as Twitter a double image of himself, top, as an actor, attending to the sultan, and, bottom, as a candidate at the elections, humbly standing by Erdoğan's desk. The caption, full of typos, goes: 'Would somebody who did not abandon his sovereign ever abandon his leader?'

Another sign of 'flexibility,' the Ottoman coat of arms, a Hamidian invention generally thought to go back to the times of Osman, is systematically modified from its original aspect by replacing the star and crescent on the green banner by the three crescents of the Turkish nationalist extreme right. While the image of a trench war waged between Kemalists and Hamidists may work well to illustrate the present situation, I believe that the AKP has shown that their capacity for cannibalizing other ideological trends, from the Unionists to Nazım Hikmet, allows them to widen or adapt their own spectrum to practically anything that may have even the remotest connection to its two constituent elements, nationalism and Islam.

How does all this relate to us and to our scholarship? The brief and encouraging reprieve I mentioned earlier, lasting roughly from the late 1980s to the early 2000s, has vanished, and all the horrors we thought were about to disappear after the 1990s are back, with a vengeance: nationalism, religion, censorship, instrumentalization and abuse of history, Turkish/Ottoman exceptionalism, sloppy scholarship, document fetishism… History is particularly targeted by this, especially with respect to the development of a highly politicized and widespread production of popular history, whose contaminating and corrupting effects can be felt across the country, to the detriment of proper scholarship. History in secondary education had always been appalling, and the rapid drop in quality witnessed across the educational system has

further amplified this phenomenon. The same is true of higher education, where electoral policies have increased the number of universities to over two hundred, the overwhelming majority of which are merely glorified high schools. In the rare cases where history is still taught with some respect for the discipline, the production has little more to offer than the publication of documents and an outdated, and of course nationalist, approach.

As to the handful of institutions where somewhat proper scholarship is practiced – including mine – there is often a disconnect with local reality, as academics and students are systematically turning towards Western scholarship and institutions, without always possessing the necessary skills, qualifications, or background for a smooth integration. Perhaps the worst is that between the miasma of politically contaminated popular culture and the ivory towers of proper universities, there is a huge void that would need to be filled by good vulgarization, the diffusion of a watered down yet sound version of academic scholarship. I do not see that happening, nor do I think it will happen in the near future given the overall polarization of politics and culture in Turkey.

The good news is that this situation is begging for comments, discussion, criticism, and analysis. History and the social sciences have a natural attraction for crisis and chaos, considering that they were created to describe, analyze, and ultimately solve them. So, there is a lot out there for us to munch on, fight over, and whine about, which I have been doing for the past half hour or so. More seriously, when I said earlier that there was some ambiguity at seeing the 'contemporary' period overrepresented in this meeting – 30 percent of the papers for a period that amounts to the past thirty years – I meant that it was certainly interesting and new, but that it was also an expression of the political and cultural malaise that characterizes Turkey today. Yet, while this may be indeed legitimate and useful in the long run, I believe it is also painful for those who come from within that very environment, and who are forced to analyze the causes and circumstances of problems, not to say evils, that impact them, their loved ones, and everything they stand for.

This may be partly my own bias as a historian, which has always made me say that 'I like them dead and preferably buried,' and made me feel uncomfortable with the emotional load of dealing with real/living individuals. Nevertheless, from my own perspective, I can assure you that I am a bit tired of having to speak about what went wrong, or what goes wrong, in my field. Obviously, I did it again today, but I tried to keep about two-thirds of my lecture within the limits of what I believe is still a scholarly debate about theory and approaches, and about methodology and sources.

This feeling is further aggravated by the interest shown in the West for the problems we are facing in Turkey. I truly regret that I have started to receive more invitations and requests to speak about Erdoğan's neo-Ottomanism than about Ottoman history. It is sad to see that our field(s) receive more attention in the West due to the present situation, as it is to note that, weirdly, Orientalism and Turkish politics end up having a lot in common in their representations of the connection between past and present.

Let me conclude briefly with the likely and unlikely outcomes of all this. Although as a historian I avoid predictions as much as I can, I think my expectations regard-

ing what is likely or unlikely to happen in our fields must be rather obvious from my observations. While I believe that the potential is there – and I can see it in this room – for our disciplines to continue flourishing thanks to an irreversible momentum that has been set in the past decades, I fear that political and ideological pressure will make it increasingly difficult to keep up this pace in Turkey, and that we may lose many of the institutional and scientific safe spaces necessary for our survival as scholars and researchers. The ideological bombardment the country is subjected to regarding 'local and national' (*yerli ve milli*) values is coupled with a passage to a new phase of action, that of direct intervention by the state and/or government – the two have to a large extent merged – on the functioning and autonomy of institutions. This includes universities, which the government has set out to conquer and force into submission. The case of my university, Boğaziçi University, is a clear indication that we have reached a point where academic freedom and institutional autonomy are no longer respected. This is a sad, in fact terrifying, situation that certainly does not bode well for the future of the humanities and the social sciences in Turkey. It also means that the methodological flaws and theoretical shortcuts I have pointed out earlier are already the least of our worries.