

Workshop: Religion and its History in Turkey

Participants	Abstracts
<p>Şebnem Köşer Akçapar</p> <p>Department of Sociology</p> <p>Social Sciences University of Ankara</p>	<p>Migration, Gender, and Religion: Continuity or Change?</p> <p>The intricate relationship between migration and religion is usually overlooked. Religion is often seen as a source of support providing a space meeting spiritual and cultural needs of migrants in the country of destination, as in the case of Muslim Turkish immigrants, or Hispanic Catholics in the USA. Yet, religion and religious identity can be a source of conflict during all migration processes, i.e. decision-making before actual migration, while in transit, and in the countries of origin. By giving examples from fieldwork focusing on different nationalities and migrant categories in Turkey – Iranian and Afghan irregular migrants and asylum seekers who converted from Islam to Evangelical Christianity, international retired migrants from Western Europe, Syrian refugees, Russian and Ukrainian residence permit holders, and Uzbek domestic migrant workers – this paper will demonstrate how and why religion has become a contested place at the intersection of gender, social class, and race. Moreover, migration may act as an accelerator stepping up social change in religious beliefs and practices not only among migrants themselves but also in the religious landscape of the local populations.</p>
<p>Gökçen Beyinli</p> <p>Asien-Afrika-Institut</p> <p>University of Hamburg</p>	<p>Living Religion Together as Text: <i>Mevlid</i> Books in the History of Turkey</p> <p>“Lived religion”, which refers to religion as practiced by everyday individuals and groups, has been developing as a field since the mid-1990s (Hall 1997, McGuire 2008, Ammerman 2022). However, the focus of the field has to a large extent been limited to American-European contexts and dominated by ethnography; the history of lived religion in the modern period is still underdeveloped. Furthermore, the field has been mostly defined by what it excludes, i.e., priority was given to practices rather than texts and beliefs or to individual agency and autonomy rather than collectivities or traditions (Ammerman 2016). This presentation aims a contribution to the field with an empirical focus of the texts of a practice, <i>Mevlid</i>, which is a poem of the Ottoman Sufi and poet Süleyman Çelebi (d. 1422), praising the prophet of Islam, written in Turkish. Reciting Mevlid in a musical manner on special occasions such as birth, circumcision or death has been a common tradition in Turkey. During the AKP-era, it has been fully transformed into a Sunni-Muslim practice. However, my research proves that it has been performed by, and for, Christians and Jews in the history of Turkey. It was also utilized by Islamists to manipulate “religious freedom”. My focus in this presentation will be the various Mevlid books published in Turkey by <i>İstanbul Maarif Kitaphanesi</i> from the 1940s to the 1970s. These books included not only the Mevlid text of Süleyman Çelebi with Alevi influences but also oral religious tales, legendary Alevi-Bektashi stories or poems of Yunus Emre. These texts were</p>

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	<p>harshly criticized by the Diyanet as being full of superstitions and certain copies were banned from sale. However, they were popular among the population, shared and read out loud in small gatherings or coffee-houses. They were re-printed and distributed widely, and it was only after the mid-1970s that they disappeared from the market, replaced by “legitimate” ones. These books demonstrate that lived religion can indeed be textual, traditional and collective. They furthermore blur binary oppositions that are hegemonic on the scholarship on religion in Turkey such as textual-oral, official-popular, high-low, orthodox-heterodox Islam or Sunni-Alevi.</p>
<p>Çiğdem Buğdaycı Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis University of Amsterdam</p>	<p>Medicalization of Sufism: The Norm of being a Secular Turkish Citizen</p> <p>After the 1925 implementation of the ban on Sufi lodges, titles, and ceremonies, little is known about the fate of such institutions and individuals. In Turkish literature, however, the motif of the “corrupt sheikh” is frequently used to describe the dangers and pitfalls of Sufism in modern society.¹ This tendency for a “secularist master narrative” elucidates the nature of the binary oppositions between secularity and religion in Turkey.² In Refik Halid Karay’s (1888–1966) 1956 novel <i>Women’s Lodge</i>, the themes of the “corrupt sheikh” and the “insatiable lust of female disciples” are repeated; however, this time their abnormality is explained as a result of their success in fusing Western and Eastern civilizations and customs, as opposed to their failure in being a modern, secular, and Western citizen in other earlier examples. To explain this discrepancy, I refer to the secularization thesis of the early twentieth century, which asserted that religion would disappear in a secularized modern society. I explain Karay’s use of the ambivalent sheikh as an anomaly in modern secularized society by referring to Foucault’s explanation of how knowledge production delineated the abnormal from the normal and led to the emergence of psychopathology as a science in the nineteenth century.³ This differentiation, which originated in psy-sciences, not only defined the normal (in our case secular) citizen but also pathologized Sufism as an anomaly. This pathologization of Sufism leads, however, to a medicalization of Sufism in both senses: on the one hand, their devotion that borders on madness becomes a clinical case, and on the other hand, the Sufi method of disciplining the self (<i>nafs</i>) is referred to as a traditional method of psychiatry when practiced by the right hands. I argue that Karay’s psychiatric perspective on Sufism is consistent with contemporary secularist and Islamist critiques of Sufism and its alleged dangers to the modern world.</p>

¹ Beatrice Hendrich, “Träume, Reime, Laptops: Die Medialisierung religiöser Erfahrung in drei türkischen Romanen,” *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, no. 25 (2017): 1–28.

² Erdağ Gökner, “Secular Blasphemies: Orhan Pamuk and the Turkish Novel,” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 45, no. 2 (2012): 301–26.

³ Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974–1975*, ed. Valerio Marchetti and Antonella Salomoni, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2003).

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<p>Ayşe Çavdar</p> <p>Bard College Berlin</p>	<p>To "Be Oneself": Ethical and Political Dynamics of Bottom-up Secularization in AKP's "New Turkey"</p> <p>Young women who have abandoned their headscarves or pious lifestyle have become one of Turkey's essential subjects of political debate in the last few years. Regardless of their numbers, they are becoming more visible with their testimonies and objections to the religious and political circles in which they grew up. Moreover, by simply existing, they testify to the existence of a political buffer zone paradoxically recreated by the ruling party's persistent policy of polarization in recent years. The stories of these young women, most of whom come from middle and upper-middle-class families, and their stories of distancing themselves from the faith and lifestyle in which they grew up display that a new wave of secularization is taking shape from below. For the representatives of this new wave of bottom-up secularization, what does the state, nation, religion, family, community, and secularism in the sense/practices known in Turkey so far mean? In this presentation, I will discuss the nature and content of this new wave of secularization by sharing excerpts from the research I have been conducting for nearly four years using digital ethnography.</p>
<p>Bekir Zakir Çoban</p> <p>Birgivi Theology Faculty</p> <p>Ege University</p>	<p>Religiosity in Turkey as Local and Political</p> <p>The inability to modernize with religion has led to a chronic problem of religion in Turkey. The neglect of religion in the idea of modernization of the republic prevented the development of a local religiosity and created an opposition with a predominant religious tone. During the AKP era, religious communities had the opportunity to work freely and religion has become more effective in the public sphere, in relation with the government's aim of raising a religious generation. Some argue that Turkey has become more religious, but others believe that this religiousness is just on the surface, because people have become tired of religion. I observe that certain members of religious institutions such as theology faculties and Diyanet feel under more pressure than before. According to them, this "religious oppression" is not very different from the secular oppression of previous times. I also observe that opponents of the government from the secular segment actually make a distinction between religion and government. Although the political conjuncture partially hinders them, these people actually have an interest in religion. The fact that they sympathize with those who criticize the dominant understanding of religion from within is an indicator of this approach. Another remarkable matter is that the various religious debates in Turkey are not purely religious but a class issue. I argue that it is necessary to approach religiosity as local and political, given that government-supported political religiosity is significantly different from local religiosity in terms of its references and sensitivities. In this sense, this political religiosity means an opposition to the classical republican ideology. In my presentation, I will share my observations and experiences on these issues.</p>

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<p>Markus Dressler</p> <p>Institute for the Study of Religion</p> <p>Leipzig University</p>	<p>Charisma, Embodiment, and Continuous Revelation – Rethinking the Conceptualization of Islam as “Discursive Tradition”</p> <p>My contribution will engage with Talal Asad’s seminal <i>The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam</i> (1986), Shahab Ahmed’s <i>What is Islam?</i> (2016) and recent contributions by Zeynep Oktay to reflect on the conceptualization of Islam. Against conceptualizations of Islam that draw on the Quranic revelation and the prophet Muhammad as nodes of Islamic normativity (Asad), or privilege textual and logocentric approaches (Ahmed), I am interested in a broader framework for Islamic normativities that transcends the level of the finite textual. Drawing on the Alevi case, and building on arguments recently developed by Oktay, I argue that the idea of continuous revelation, the importance of charisma, in the sense of embodiment of the divine in humans, places and things, as well as affective connections through soundscapes and aesthetic formations are important factors in the condensation of Islamic normativities. Taking them seriously requires pluralization of our approach to Islam as discursive tradition. Such pluralization is in line with a genealogical perspective, which should be sceptical of conceptualizations of Islam that embark from hegemonic enunciations of Islam, i.e. enunciations that take for granted the scripture-centeredness of Islamic piety and devotion.</p>
<p>Timur Hammond</p> <p>Department of Geography and Environment</p> <p>Syracuse University</p>	<p>Urban Worlds of Islam: Networks, Traditions, and Places</p> <p>Despite ongoing attempts to develop alternative frameworks, the tension between the ‘religious’ and the ‘secular’ continues to define scholarship on Islam in 20th century Turkey. This paper contributes to these recent discussions by calling attention to some of the geographical assumptions that are built into these debates. It suggests that much of this scholarship depends upon the metaphor of space-as-container where religion is located ‘in space.’ While such approaches are valuable, this paper argues that scholars should also draw upon an analytic of places-of-connection to better understand the geographies of Islam. It illustrates those arguments through a discussion of two figures who moved through early 20th century Eyüp: Hacı Cemal Öğüt and Ahmet Süheyl Ünver.</p>
<p>Smita Tewari Jassal</p> <p>Faculty of Sociology and Anthropology</p>	<p>Baraka in the Turkish Imaginary</p> <p><i>Baraka</i> or <i>Bereket</i>, a religiously inflected term is commonly used in Turkey. With a focus on this layered and religiously inflected concept, I explore how practices associated with mainstream Islam, pre-Islam, as well as Alevism converge to produce distinctly Turkish understandings about everyday piety in contemporary Turkey. Since a variety of socio historic reasons and diverse social imaginaries about Islam and its visibility in public life have led to widely divergent contemporary practices, what transpires for example during shrine visits, also illuminates the</p>

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<p>Ashoka University</p>	<p>multi-layered meanings of the term. The dialectical relationship at the core of <i>baraka</i> may be found in processes of negotiation between pilgrim and saint, visitor and shrine, but understandings about baraka also permeate Turkish social life. Beginning with how the term is understood by those making <i>ziyara</i> to the shrines of saints, I explore understandings about baraka in both religious and “secular” contexts. Besides reflection on meaning making, I argue that on the one hand people seek mystical and spiritual blessings and on the other, tangible material benefits ranging from bodily health to wealth and prosperity. Thus, while visits to saint shrines may constitute one, albeit declining arena of Turkish religiosity, of equal interest are other contexts within which Islam’s conceptual vocabulary may be encountered.</p>
<p>Önder Küçükural</p> <p>Alliance of Civilizations Institute</p> <p>Ibn Haldun University</p>	<p>Nonreligious Imaginaries in the Turkish Context: What is more Banal? Secularism or Religion</p> <p>Lois Lee (2015), in her seminal work “Recognising the Non-religious,” questions “if people do not even notice the non-religious images and slogans around them, does this not suggest that they are fundamentally indifferent to them and that these don’t really matter?” (p.2) Inspired by Billig’s notion of banality, Lee upholds an alternative view and argues that everyday forms of secularism (she uses nonreligion and subjective secularity interchangeably, I will also follow her) may go unnoticed like dusty flags and they excite little attention, but they can have a profound influence on contemporary culture. This paper explores similar yet different dynamics in the religion-related field (Quack, 2014) in the Turkish context. The question I want to explore in this paper is “What is banal in the Turkish context? Is it secularism or religion?” The cases and data I use are part of the on-going field research on nonreligion in 7 cities in Turkey and funded by TUBITAK. Following Quack’s (2014) relational approach, I will argue that religion and secularism are made mundane and invisible for some sections of society, while simultaneously eliciting great excitement from other sections. Both these concepts are still polarizing fault lines in the Turkish context. From some of the participants in the field work we heard that both religion and secularism as something which is ‘traditional’, pervasive, normal, and potentially banal. These ideas come out through their assumptions, connotations, and identifications that appear in their discourses and performances. For some other participants on the other hand, the topics of religion and secularism are still fresh. Religion and secularism are still polarizing topics in the context of Turkey. Thus, participant’s position in this polarization seems to determine what they consider banal. An analogy from a slightly different context might help to clarify what I mean. Many official buildings in Turkey have nationalist quotes written on walls. A very common such quote is “Ne mutlu Türküm diyene/ Happy is he who says I’m a Turk.” To a person that identifies as a Turk and resides in Kadikoy, Istanbul this sentence is trivial to the point of being invisible. To a person identifying as a Kurd and residing in Diyarbakır this quote is a reminder of systemically oppressive state practices. In this paper I show that we are dealing with similar undercurrents in the daily practices and symbols of religion and nonreligion/secularism. Data from the fieldwork point to the fact that</p>

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	<p>there are discursive positions and imagineries (Beaman & Stacey, 2021) shaped by either religion or secularism. They are normative, contentious, and vibrant enough to still mold individual and societal ‘identity’ and practice.</p> <p>References:</p> <p>Lee, L. (2015). “The Unwaved Flag: Everyday and Banal Forms of Non-Religion” <i>Recognizing the Non-religious: Reimagining the Secular</i>. Oxford University Press.</p> <p>Beaman, L. G., & Stacey, T. (Eds.). (2021). <i>Nonreligious Imaginaries of World Repairing</i>. Springer International Publishing.</p> <p>Quack, J. 2014. Outline of a Relational Approach to ‘Nonreligion’. <i>Method & Theory in the Study of Religion</i> 26(4–5): 439–469.</p>
<p>Nil Mutluer</p> <p>Institute for the Study of Religion</p> <p>Leipzig University</p>	<p>Tactics of Everyday Religion and Secularity in Turkey</p> <p>Laicism in Turkey, has been the reference point for the continuation of the top-down Kemalist nationalist state policies since the proclamation of the Republic. The top-down, hegemonic model of Turkish modernization spawned the "laic Kemalist - Islamic" antagonism and caused the fundamental values to be built around the two poles. This antagonism has shaped the gender, family, age, religion, ethnicity and class-based power relations in which Kemalists were regarded as the value/norm setter and the main power holder, until the AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, Justice and Development Party) came to power in 2002 elections. Despite this antagonism at state and political level, religion and secularity are lived in plurality and everyday life reveals the fact that the modern political frame of what is described as secular -laic- or religious -Muslim- does not fit in everyday life encounters and settings. Everyday reveals the plurality of the discourses, practices and meanings attributed to religious and secular. The aim of this presentation/study is to reveal this plurality in the everyday context of today’s Turkey. Based on ethnographic field works carried out on Kemalist Feminists, Muslims and Informal Women Organizations this discussion examines the everyday tactics utilized in relation to state, religious and non-religious organizations as well as everyday interactions. It also seeks to understand the local contextualization of religious and secular in various power relations.</p>

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<p>Zeynep Oktay</p> <p>Department of Turkish Language and Literature</p> <p>Boğaziçi University</p>	<p>The History of Popular Religion in Turkey: Conceptual and Methodological Issues</p> <p>Our representations of the Muslim past rely largely on the textual and material products of the urban, literate, and male elite. Efforts to extend beyond this framework pose methodological and conceptual problems. In this paper, past conceptualization such as “folk Islam” and recent concepts such as “agrarian religion” will be evaluated in search for a terminology that refrains from positing binaries while also taking account of religious difference and plurality. The role of literary texts and manuscripts as sources on the history of popular religiosity will be discussed and the unique methodologies required by these sources will be investigated. How can we imagine the oral consumption of these texts and the communities that are formed in this process? How do we imagine intertextuality in the oral tradition? Considering these issues will also lead us to question the presumed binary between the religious and the non-religious in pre-modern Anatolian society.</p>
<p>Mark Soileau</p> <p>Independent Scholar</p>	<p>What is Felt When a Martyr Falls in Modern Turkey</p> <p>Martyrdom is an attribution bestowed upon an individual who has died a usually violent and often bloody death for the sake of a cause or struggle on behalf of a group (“us”) and at the hands of an enemy (“them”). In the case of martyrdom (<i>şehitlik</i>) in contemporary Turkey, the relevant group identity is most prominently conceived of as the Turkish nation, with Sunni Islamic overtones. Because it brings together themes like struggle, violence, death, sacrifice, and community, the concept of martyrdom bears strong affectivity – that is, the potential to convey and engender emotions in members of the relevant community. These emotions may include sorrow, indebtedness, pride, anger, and vengeance. Because the martyr figure bears such cultural gravity and thus political utility, his memory is perpetuated through various means, including the naming of streets and schools, narrative texts, dramatic images, poems and songs, and other forms of emotional discourse and expression. It is through these media that the affectivity of martyrdom is actualized. This paper will explore the aesthetic and affective dimensions of the commemoration of martyrs in modern Turkey, analyzing the forms through which they are commemorated and the emotions thereby conveyed, with reference to several historical moments: the wars that constitute the republic’s birth narrative (the defense of Çanakkale and the War of Liberation), the fight against separatist terrorism, and most recently the coup attempt of 15 July 2016. It will show how the emotions engendered through the martyr motif and its dramatic symbols work culturally, though these emotions might be felt differently by different individuals from different sets of surroundings at different times.</p>

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<p>Jeremy F. Walton</p> <p>Department of Cultural Studies</p> <p>University of Rijeka</p>	<p>Religious Freedom, Spatial Politics, and Heritagization in Today's Turkey</p> <p>In recent years, scholars such as Winnifred Sullivan (2005) and Elizabeth Shaman Hurd (2015) have plumbed the political ideal of “religious freedom” and its discontents. Through legal enshrinement and application, “religious freedom” creates myriad dilemmas and even “impossibilities” for a variety of religious actors, especially those of minoritized communities, even as the imperative of “religious freedom” has also inspired new, internationalized modalities of governance. My own earlier work (Walton 2017) interrogated the formations of religious freedom, secularism and civil society in Turkey in relation to both Sunni and Alevi institutions and collectivities. In this presentation, I aim to integrate these previous discussions of religious freedom, which have largely focused on legal-institutional questions, with an interrogation of the politics of religious spaces and religious heritage. To do so, I compare and contrast three specific sites in Istanbul: Hagia Sophia (<i>Ayasofya-i Kebir Camii</i>), Saint Stephen's Bulgarian Church (<i>Sveti Stefan Crkva; Demir kilise</i>) and the recently-opened Yavuz Selim Sultan Bridge. On the basis of its recent reconsecration as a mosque, Hagia Sophia illustrates an aggressive religious-spatial politics that frames religious freedom as a majoritarian project in antagonistic relation to “secularism”. By contrast, Saint Stephen's Church, the unique, publicly-visible Bulgarian-Orthodox site in Istanbul, enshrines an image of religious freedom as a minority politics of recognition and a salvage project in relation to the Ottoman Empire's erstwhile, diminished non-Muslim communities. Finally, Alevi protests against the naming of the third Bosphorus bridge after Yavuz Selim Sultan, who authorized massacres of Alevi-Kızılbaş during the early 16th century, articulates religious freedom as a politics of protest on the part of a community that has been denied legal recognition and, for the most part, lacks monumental sites of memory and heritagization.</p>
<p>Bret Wilson</p> <p>Department of History</p> <p>Central European University</p>	<p>The Last Masters: Sufi Shaykhs at the End of Empire and in the Early Republic</p> <p>This paper examines the biographies of Sufi leaders (<i>shaykhs</i>) in the empire-to-republic transition to demonstrate how they coped – as a group – with the suppression of Sufism in 1925, which eliminated their jobs and, in many cases, forced them to relocate. The picture that emerges is diverse: some embraced the post-1925 context, working in state jobs and becoming enthusiastic Kemalists, while others withdrew from public life and some rejected secularism in its entirety. The dominant trend is that Sufi masters worked with and sometimes for the new republican state, often in jobs in the cultural or educational realms, sometimes in politics, and more seldom for the new state religious bureaucracy, Diyanet. To varying degrees, Sufi leaders maintained an above-average social status but many had to accept a diminution of their former prestige. Most accepted this fate while fewer numbers emigrated to continue their vocation abroad in Syria, Egypt, or Albania. This paper represents one of the first attempts to understand secularization through the collective experience of Sufi masters. It is accompanied by the production of a</p>

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	database about shaykhs about their post-1925 occupations.
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