




EDITOR INTRODUCTION

Editors' Introduction

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Since before the publication of *New Perspectives on Turkey's* spring 2023 issue, politics has been at the top of the agenda of public discussions in Turkey. The reason was the general elections for the presidency and the parliament on May 14; in the run-off on May 28, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was re-elected for a third, five-year term and the party he leads, the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*; AKP), maintained its majority in the parliament in an alliance with the Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*; MHP) and smaller extremist parties. To what extent and how quickly the election results will lead to a further descent into full authoritarianism – already well documented in the pages of previous NPT issues – is something that social scientists are likely to continue to observe. Domestic politics therefore will continue to be an important theme for social science research on Turkey from diverse disciplines and methodologies.

The current 69th issue of *New Perspectives on Turkey* perhaps reflects this preoccupation, as it features six research articles, three of which are concerned with politics, an essay commemorating the work of late historian Zafer Toprak, as well as three book reviews.

We were deeply saddened by the loss of Professor Zafer Toprak on June 3, 2023, one of the leading scholars of late Ottoman and early Republican history and a former editorial board member and author of NPT. Issue number 69 opens with a commemorative essay celebrating the work of Toprak by fellow historian Mehmet Ö. Alkan. As Alkan reminds, Zafer Toprak was keen on emphasizing the continuities between the late Ottoman Empire and early Turkish Republic in terms of politics and society.

Following the commemorative essay is a history article by Uğur Bayraktar, “Salt of the Empire: the making of an Ottoman monopoly, 1838–1881.” This article studies the formation and transformation of the modern fiscal state through an analysis of the making of the Ottoman salt monopoly in the nineteenth century. While the major focus of Ottoman finances in this period has been on public debt, the Ottoman efforts of centralization of tax collection through salt revenues had been largely overlooked. Bayraktar reads this important aspect of the Ottoman state's experimentation with salt taxes as a process that sheds light on the understanding of the Empire as a modern fiscal state which sought to increase its revenues through centralizing tax collection. Bayraktar also diligently documents the consequences and reactions of these policies among consumers and traders of salt.

The presence of migrants and refugees was such a significant topic during the run-up to the presidential elections that the opposition candidate Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu intensified his promise to “send back” Syrian refugees before the run-offs in a vain hope for a win against Erdoğan. However, the rise of the nationalist political discourse advocating “sending back” Syrians goes back much earlier than the recent elections and is not at all exclusive to the opposition. The second research article in this issue, entitled “Sending ‘our brothers’ back ‘home’: continuity and change in President Erdoğan’s discourse on Syrian refugees” is precisely on this topic. Kerem Morgül shows, through a quantitative analysis of 382 speeches by Erdoğan between 2014 and 2022, that there has been a sharp increase in his remarks about sending back Syrians since 2018, although Islamist and neo-Ottomanist themes had dominated his earlier remarks on Syrians. Morgül’s qualitative analysis based on critical discourse analysis also shows that Erdoğan has appropriated the language of international law and standards on refugee returns so that he can continue to claim the moral high ground while simultaneously advocating mass repatriation of Syrians.

The next article in this issue is also about politics, politics of monuments, and the collective political memory that they seek to fashion. This is a topic that motivates scholars in different parts of the world from the USA to the UK and South Africa to question the ways in which the past is remembered and how the history of the present is shaped through commemorative activities and spaces. AKP made ample use of its thwarting of the coup attempt on July 15, 2016 to consolidate its electoral support. The quest to form a new collective memory around the newly declared national holiday of July 15 was discussed in the pages of a previous issue of *New Perspectives on Turkey*. In this issue, Erdem Üngür, in an article entitled “The ‘glitch’ of Rabia monuments: a semiotic analysis of July 15 monuments in Turkey” focuses on a specific aspect of that quest. He addresses the government’s efforts to create a mnemonic structure through erecting July 15 monuments. However, his examination of these public monuments shows that the effort has not been without criticism from AKP’s own political allies. Üngür illustrates this through the falling from grace of monuments depicting the Rabia sign, borrowed from the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, which was supposed to symbolize AKP’s anti-coup slogan of “one nation, one homeland, one flag, one state.”

Past NPT authors have examined the monumentalization of and the collective memory surrounding important events in Turkey in other historical contexts as well. In this issue, we feature another article that touches upon monumentalization, this time through a critical reading of the award-winning director Nuri Bilge Ceylan’s film *Ahlat Ağacı* (The Wild Pear Tree). Hülya Adak and Murat Akser explore the mythmaking and monumentalization surrounding the Gallipoli Battle of 1915 and the multiple ways in which Ceylan’s film unsettles those myths. The authors argue that the film signals not only the impotence and vanity of nationalist masculinities but also the caesuras and instabilities in national myths. They suggest that, in a final scene, the film alludes to the possibility of unearthing lost others of national mythmaking in a country where collective amnesia reigns.

The next article by H. Bahadır Türk is in a way also concerned with politics, specifically with gendered political identities. In “‘Invisible sisters, invincible brothers’: tracing masculine domination within the Turkish Left,” Türk focuses on the construction of gendered political identities in the leftist social movement in Turkey from the late 1960s to the 1980s. Drawing upon memoirs written by members of

left-wing organizations and interviews conducted with them, he argues that the narratives of members of the Turkish left reflect masculine domination. The article argues that leftist movements in this period in their attempts to establish more organic ties with the people incorporated the existing conservative sociocultural gender codes.

The final research article in issue number 69 concerns social policy and gender. In “Gendered familialism in a Mediterranean context: women’s labor market participation and early childhood education and care in Turkey,” the authors Başak Akkan, Ayşe Buğra, and Trudie Knijn examine the slow progress in both women’s labor market participation and early childhood care services in a comparative framework with other Mediterranean countries. By exploring Turkey as a case of a familialist regime that has not experienced a significant shift in its gender regime, they argue that the expansion of early childhood care since the 2000s has taken place through market-driven services, which puts women from lower socio-economic groups at a disadvantage, thus highlighting the classed and gendered consequences of that regime.

Finally in this issue, we feature three book reviews on books on ecology and history. The first one of the two reviews on ecology is by Barış Taşyakan and discusses Chris Gratien’s *The Unsettled Plain: An Environmental History of the Late Ottoman Frontier* illustrating the rising field of environmental history with a closer look at Çukurova. The second review is by Muhammet Oytun Elaçmaz, discussing Caterina Scaramelli’s *How to Make a Wetland: Water and Moral Ecology in Turkey*, an ambitious work on current policies regulating and imagining coastal areas from the perspective of environmentalism in Turkey. The third review is by Önder Uçar and discusses Bedross Der Matossian’s *The Horrors of Adana: Revolution and Violence in the Early Twentieth Century*, another book focusing on the Çukurova region, this time on ethnic relations at the end of the Empire.

This issue is published as the Republic of Turkey is marking its centennial in November 2023. Social scientists have been busy reflecting on the momentous transformation that the transition from an empire to a nation-state had brought about. They have also been trying to formulate whether contemporary Turkey is going through yet another transformation in the 2020s under the increasingly conservative and authoritarian AKP rule that could be comparable to the wave of change that it went through in the 1920s which resulted in almost a completely new society. *New Perspectives on Turkey* has stood witness to the scholarly discussions exploring the contours of social change as the country’s first century drew to a close and its second century is dawning. NPT’s 69th issue with articles on contemporary politics, social policy, collective memory, and critical readings of Ottoman and Republican history is part and parcel of this ongoing effort. *New Perspectives on Turkey* will continue to observe contemporary social change and its cultural, political, and economic dynamics with a vibrant historical sensitivity in post-Ottoman geographies and polities.