

Women *and* the City, Women *in* the City: A Gendered Perspective for Ottoman Urban History

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by Dr. Nazan Maksudyan

Regarding the traditional and well-established gendered participation and representation in the public sphere, urban history, in parallel with many other subfields of history, might tend to focus more on *his* story rather than *her* stories. However, growing and expanding scholarship on the history of women of the last few decades demonstrated the importance of recognizing the agency of women, and thus, the necessity of introducing their roles as relevant into the larger picture. Historians started to acknowledge women as manipulating, if not shaping, urban space. Women did more than react to alterations in urban space: They actively participated in changing the *map* of the city and in redefining its essence.

It is true that diverse groups of women approached the city from different angles, with distinct intents, and with unequal pace. The relationship between women and the public space was an intricate one, defined along the lines of class, ethnic and religious identity, age, and historical moment. Heterogeneous everyday experiences and domestic spaces of women determined their relation to and presence in public arenas. For that matter, women from different class, religious, ethnic or immigrant backgrounds also had manifold linkages within themselves and with the urban space. Furthermore, the city was more than its economic and ethnic geography; urban sexual geography crosscut them, in both ideological and

physical terms. For instance, the presence of elite women in working-class neighborhoods would be a breach of proper sexual geography, since only working women and prostitutes (having a thin line in-between) were allowed there. Thus, definitions of class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality were all intermixed in the urban geography.

However, women from diverse backgrounds succeeded in challenging and negotiating the over-imbued sexual division of urban space. Both through rivalries and alliances amongst themselves, they formed new urban relations and spaces and empowered themselves to have a say in changing the urban structure regarding neighborhoods, streets, schools, workplaces, legal regulations, and public spaces.

In that respect, the workshop "Women *and* the City, Women *in* the City: A Gendered Perspective for Ottoman Urban History" attempted to reveal, recover and reconsider the roles, positions, and actions of women in the midst of altered, or redefined economic, social, political, and cultural contexts of the late- and post-Ottoman cities. It reconsidered the negotiations, alliances, and agency of women in asserting themselves in the public domain, in which even today they are faced with obstacles and resistance as legitimate actors. In cities, neither designed for nor controlled by women, women had to

re-imagine and re-conceive the city before they would create female-controlled public and semi-public spaces.

On the first day of the two-day-meeting, four papers were presented during two separate sessions in the morning and in the afternoon. Iris Agmon (Ben Gurion University) elaborated upon the question of historical sources and the absent voices of non-elite women, focusing in particular on legal sources. Analyzing a sharia court case from the early twentieth century Haifa, she dwelt upon the legal reforms and the meaning of ordinary people's signatures on official documents. In an attempt to understand the changes in the perception of previously Ottoman provinces of North Africa, Nora Lafi (Zentrum Moderner Orient) discussed the development of a new form of oriental gaze in the new republic of Turkey towards North-African women, both as victims of the colonial exploitation and object of an orientalist cultural and erotic fascination.

In the afternoon session, Gülhan Balsoy (Işık University), as the third presenter of the first day, focused on the emergence of medical institutions for women in Istanbul, namely *Haseki Women's Hospital* (1847) and the *Maternity Clinic (Viladethane)* (1892), and commented on their role in restructuring the cityscape. The last paper by Nil Birol (Central European University) examined the encounter of Russian Tatar women from Kazan with the leading female figures of the Ottoman urban social life in Istanbul in the early twentieth century within the context of the inclusion of Russian-born Muslim Tatars into the new Ottoman administration.

In the evening of the first day of the workshop, there was a keynote speech by Leyla Neyzi (Sabancı University), followed by the screening of a documentary film directed by Talin Suciyan (Ludwig Maximilian University

of Munich) and Lara Aharonian.

Leyla Neyzi presented an oral history of a neighborhood in Istanbul to show how contemporary conflicts over identity and inequality in Turkey are expressed through representations of the past. She discussed the emergence of Turkish modernity and the rise of Istanbul as a global metropolis through the spaces/places of a created environment, the middle-class neighborhood of Teşvikiye. The documentary that followed, *Finding Zabel Yesayan* (Yerevan, 2008), was on the bifurcated life of an Armenian socialist, activist and feminist writer, Zabel Yesayan, who was born in 1878 in Istanbul, who managed to escape the genocide of 1915 in the Ottoman Empire, yet became a victim of the Stalinist regime and killed on her way to Siberia in 1943.

On the second day of the workshop, the sessions started with the presentation of Sevgi Adak (Leiden University) on the gender aspect of the social change in early republican Turkey. With an attempt to study the transformation of the gender regime and the interaction between the state and societal actors, she focused on regulations and resistance regarding women's dress and unveiling. Also focusing on early republican Turkey, Ellinor Morack (Frei University) discussed the meaning of inter-communal marriages in Izmir in the context of the Population Exchange of 1923. As the status of women was legally determined by the husband, marriage sometimes enabled them to make choices, not available to men and therefore take agency.

The second part of the Friday session on post-Ottoman cities specifically focused on the former Ottoman "Arab provinces". On Barak (Princeton University) has dealt with the reorientation of women in the city and reshuffling of "private" and "public" spheres with the impact of the newly

introduced technologies that separated the visible body from the invisible voice, such as the radio or telephone.

He examined the roles played by new technologies of communication and transportation in redefining urban spaces and gender in early twentieth-century Egypt. As the second presenter of the session, Vahé Tachjian (Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturforschung) analyzed the reintegration of Armenian women as the survivors of the Catastrophe of 1915 into the urban space of post-World War I Aleppo. He specifically focused on those women who married Muslims during the deportations and the children born out of these marriages, as well as those who turned to prostitution for survival. The presentation by Ulrike Freitag (Zentrum Moderner Orient, Freie Universität) was centered on a traditional women's carnival in Jeddah during which they celebrated publicly in men's clothes. By describing this little-known ceremony, she raised questions as to its meaning in the overall gendered order of early twentieth century Jeddah.

At the very last panel of the workshop, Haytham Bahooora (University of Colorado; Fellow of EUME 2009/2010) discussed the representations of prostitution in twentieth-century Iraqi literature, with an emphasis on the emergence of shifting representations of the prostitute in modernist literary experimentations from the 1930s to the 1950s. After elaborating upon the potential uses of memoir genre for writing Ottoman gender history and methodological advantages and drawbacks of using them, Christoph Herzog (Otto Friedrich University of Bamberg) analyzed the diary of an adolescent girl in Trabzon during the First World War. He touched upon the ever present dichotomy of urbanity versus nature and linked it to the nascent republican regime's fascination with the countryside as opposed to Ottoman

cosmopolitan urbanity.

As a whole, these twelve papers, with their differing preference of source materials (court records, state archives, oral sources, literary material, memoirs, newspapers, etc.), with their fairly wide geographical span (from Iraq to Kazan, from Jeddah to İzmir), and with diverse theoretical backgrounds they relied on, proved for the fruitful outcomes of the collaboration between urban history and gender studies. The papers and following discussions made it clear that in order to better understand the intricacies of late- and post-Ottoman urbanity, the inclusion of a perspective of gender seems not only enriching but also necessary. Therefore, it is hoped that this workshop inspires similar initiatives and humbly contribute to the further development of the field.

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DR. NAZAN MAKSUDYAN

studierte Politikwissenschaft an der Boğazi University in Istanbul. Ihr aktuelles Forschungsprojekt, an dem sie als EUME-Fellow in Berlin arbeitet, konzentriert sich auf die Einführung von Berufsausbildungen für verwaiste, mittellose und arme Kinder in den Ballungsgebieten der Provinzen des Osmanischen Reiches.