Istanbul
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INTRODUCTION

Between Neo-Ottomanism and Neoliberalism

THE POLITICS OF IMAGINING ISTANBUL

Nora Fisher-Onar

I am listening to Istanbul, my eyes closed.

— Orhan Veli

On an early summer day, in a year likely to be remembered for terrorist attacks, a coup attempt, and the aftermath of both, a seaside neighborhood in Istanbul prepared to memorialize a very different era. The May 29, 2016, celebration in Yenikapi’s massive square brought together a million people, many arriving on 5,005 buses from thirty-eight provinces beyond the city. Their purpose was to honor the 1453 fetih or “conquest” of Istanbul by the Ottoman sultan Mehmet II.

The spectacle showcased poetry read by ax-wielding actors from an Ottoman-inspired soap opera. Audiences were also treated to an Ottoman-style marching band. Garbed in colorful period costume, the ensemble boasted 563 members in a gesture to the years that had passed since the conquest. Next on the program was a choreographed salute of “Turkish Stars” fighter planes, whose plumes of red-and-white smoke honored the national colors. Following a speech by Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan took the stage. In a rousing address to “sacred Istanbul,” he linked the city’s Ottoman-Islamic glories to a present political agenda: building a “New Turkey” with Erdoğan at the helm. Supporters were then dazzled by a 3D sound and light extravaganza featuring a 4,500-square-meter stage in the image of Istanbul’s ancient ramparts. Boasting an LED screen of 450 square meters, over 500 period-costumed extras, and a life-sized replica of an Ottoman war galley, the spectacle was broadcast live in six world languages.¹
A production befitting the globalized cultural industries, the scenario channeled a homegrown reading of Istanbul’s history steeped in national-cum-religious pride. In keeping with the theme of “conquest,” images like a massive sword inscribed in Arabic script were shown to overwhelm symbols of the city’s earlier rulers: a crumbling cross and a bust of the Roman emperor Constantine, which spontaneously shattered. As the spectacle neared its climax, with Ottoman warriors breaching Byzantine ramparts, the crowd cheered as if at a rock concert finale. Affirming the sense of catharsis, a baritone narrator concluded by proclaiming that henceforth Ottoman “justice” (adalet) would rule a better world.²

The spectacle attested to how swiftly visions of a place’s past—and future—can change. Only two decades earlier Erdoğan, whose star was rising as mayor of Istanbul, had complained that visiting tourists might not realize that they were in a Muslim country because of the lack of religious markers in public places, symbols that “allow you to make a statement to observers.”³ At that time Erdoğan’s municipality had been a rival, not an ally, of the then prosecularist establishment in Ankara. His vision of Istanbul as once-and-future seat of Ottoman-Islamic glory accordingly was dismissed as a marginal project.

Ankara usurped Istanbul as the seat of government in the 1920s. The founders of the Republic of Turkey (1923) rejected the metropole’s imperial mixing of waters and peoples. They were determined to build a brave new nation-state in arid Anatolia instead.⁴ Like Venice, Istanbul became a fading if alluring hologram of an eclipsed world. This image of the city was immortalized in the melancholic ruminations of writers like Orhan Veli and Orhan Pamuk and in the gritty photography of Ara Güler.⁵

Economically and culturally, however, Istanbul proved “too big to fail.”⁶ Waves of rural to urban migration after the 1950s and economic liberalization beginning in the 1980s revitalized labor, capital, and trade flows. By the cusp of the twenty-first century, Istanbul was poised to reclaim its mantle as premier urban center of a vast region from the Balkans and Caucasus to the Levant.⁷ Growing from a population of 1 million in 1940, to 3 million in 1970, to 7.3 million in 1990, Istanbul today is home to some 14 million souls.⁸ The city further received almost one visitor per resident in 2015, making it the third most trafficked airport in Europe and—until a precipitous drop-off beginning in 2016 due to political upheavals—the world’s fifth most popular tourist destination.⁹

In tempo with its mounting visibility, the contest for ownership of Istanbul’s story intensified. Its position at the intersection of ancient and new histories¹⁰ rendered the narrative possibilities vast. The menu of choices offered by Yenikapı alone, site of the fetih festivities, is illustrative. During the construction of the Bosphorus rail tunnel from 2004 to 2013, the terminus of which is at Yenikapı, Neolithic artifacts were discovered revealing 8,500 years of continuous habitation. Also uncovered were thirty-seven sunken ships, the oldest of which may date back 1,500 years. Like Yenikapı’s original Byzantine-era walls, these maritime relics reveal the city’s role as center of the Orthodox oikumene or “inhabited
world” for almost a millennium. The enduring resonance of these finds is evident in their commodification for global audiences today. Plans are in place to build an “archeo-park” and a new museum to showcase the treasures for visitors. Yet neither the Stone Age nor the Byzantine legacy defines the city in the minds of its present owners.

A Tale of Two Cities: Belle Époque and Ottoman-Islamic Istanbul

Today it is the Ottoman era that has captured the collective imagination. I argue that this period is widely read through two frames: Belle Époque Istanbul and Ottoman-Islamic Istanbul. They share many features, from neo-Ottoman nostalgia to function, social base, and normative thrust. These similarities belie simplistic readings of the city (and country) as torn between “liberalism” and a Western orientation and “Islam” and an Oriental character. Yet ultimately they offer, via Istanbul, rival answers to the driving questions of this volume and perhaps the outstanding challenge of our time: How do we live together in diversity? How can we share space, even thrive, with people whose hopes jostle against our own?

Neo-Ottoman Nostalgia

Belle Époque Istanbul is inspired by the city’s role in nineteenth-century globalization, when many called it Constantinople. A major port whose commerce attracted 130,000 foreign residents, the city was embedded in a Mediterranean space and international system dominated by the European great powers. Yet it was also an imperial hub in its own right—site of three millennia of continuous imperial government, and ruler of the Ottomans’ Balkan, Caucasian, and Middle Eastern hinterlands. The city’s vibrancy was thus riddled with paradox: Belle Époque Istanbul was enlivened by the very economic, political, and cultural forces that were chipping away at the empire of which it was the capital. This fraught interplay of internal and external imperial logics remains imprinted on the built spaces and syncretic vibe of neighborhoods like Beyoğlu, the old European embassy quarter.

Beyoğlu and adjacent areas like the port of Karaköy also epitomize the Belle Époque emergence of Ottoman non-Muslim communities as the empire’s first bourgeoisie. Comprising almost 20 percent of the Ottoman population in 1914, their legacy remains visible in apartment blocks, places of worship, schools, and place-names in the cityscape. The people, however, are missing. Driven away by recurring waves of nationalism and persecution, among other forces, Turkey’s combined Greek, Armenian, Jewish, and Levantine population has declined from millions to under 100,000 today. Nevertheless, as many of this volume’s authors note, memorialization of the spaces that non-Muslim communities once filled in tribute to Belle Époque cosmopolitanism proceeds apace in the city’s recreational districts.
A second widely invoked era is Istanbul’s *Ottoman-Islamic* glory days. Increasingly salient across the cultural industries—advertising, design, architecture, fashion, television, and cinema production—Ottoman-Islamic Istanbul is the city of the *fetih* festivities. This neo-Ottoman imaginary begins in earnest with the life and times of Mehmet the Conqueror (1432–1481)—so named for his capture of the city—through the period of Süleyman the Magnificent (or “Law-giver”; 1494–1566).¹⁹ It was during this period that many of the minarets and domes of the Golden Horn’s famed skyline were built. They served as a backdrop to the largest urban center in Europe, with some 700,000 inhabitants by the seventeenth century.²⁰ Renditions of its silhouette and other neo-Ottoman motifs in consumables from candelabras to kitchen tiles are a stamp of the Ottoman-Islamic imaginary today.

The glory days of Kostantiniyye, as it was called in the Islamicate world, are said to have continued through the Tulip period (1718–1730). Cultural and commercial life flourished in conversation with early modern Europe, but was not yet overtaken by Western forms and norms.²¹ An often-cited example is the transmission of Ottoman high society’s Tulip mania to Holland after the sultan gave bulbs and seeds to a Flemish ambassador. This Ottoman-centric reading of the flow of ideas, goods, and people legitimizes the claim today that the city embodies Turco-Muslim authenticity. This strand of nostalgia also can encompass later figures like the iron-fisted Sultan Abdülhamit II, whose reign from 1876 to 1909 is portrayed by some as a bulwark of Ottoman-Islamic integrity in the face of encroaching foreign powers.

Ottoman-Islamic Istanbul and its admirers are often associated with neighborhoods within the walls of the “old city.” In Fatih, a quarter whose very name pays tribute to Mehmet’s exploits, the historic mosque-market nexus of Islamicate urbanity is said to endure.²² In the eyes of many an observer—local and outsider alike—the contrast between Fatih and Beyoğlu is suggestive of an Islamist versus Westernist divide.

Closer analysis, however, reveals entanglement. As a flourishing literature on the politics of space documents, rivalry between the *Belle Époque* and Ottoman-Islamic imaginaries is by no means binary. Both, after all, are products of the late modern, neoliberal order.²³ Their contestation entails overlap in substance, intersection in motives, and alliance building, as well as competitive behavior. In Fatih, as in Beyoğlu, Karaköy, and other historical neighborhoods like run-down Tarlabası—age-old sanctuary of the urban underclasses—multiple periods and protagonists clamor to be heard.

Istanbul’s municipal headquarters is located in Fatih and has been run since 1994 by parties associated with Turkey’s political Islamist tradition: the Welfare Party (RP) and its successor, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP).²⁴ Proreligious administrations have invested in the rehabilitation of both *Belle Époque* and Ottoman-Islamic Istanbul, while tending to privilege the latter. This is evident in commemorative activities employing the gamut of Ranger
and Hobsbawm’s tools of “invented tradition,” in which historical memories are appropriated to legitimize present policies. Examples include lavish events like the fetih extravaganza and an annual Tulip festival “to bring the once beloved flower home after centuries of neglect induced by Westernization.”

Istanbul’s Ottoman-era monuments are being restored and new structures evoke Ottoman-Islamic motifs. The pattern is especially evident in a boom of new mosques that gesture to the great, sixteenth-century architect Sinan. The massive Çamlıca mosque, for example, will redefine the Bosphorus skyline upon its completion. Municipal neo-Ottomanism and its inflection on ordinary lives attest, in turn, to the interplay of official and everyday “politics of piety.”

By internalizing and demanding Ottoman-Islamic referents, the city’s pious neoliberal subjects embrace and configure modernity in a Muslim-majority global city.

**Neoliberal Agenda**

*Belle Époque* and Ottoman-Islamic Istanbul thus both display imperial nostalgia but attend to differentiated periods. Each also serves as a sort of municipal imaginary with national-level traction. That is, they enable selective assimilation of information about Istanbul’s history to promote twenty-first-century agendas regarding the city, and the country more broadly. Politically, such interventions bestow material form and legitimacy on ideological projects while galvanizing supporters. And analytically, as Charles King demonstrates in chapter 4 of this volume, they furnish a redolent site of analysis comparable across time and space. After all, just as *Belle Époque* and Ottoman-Islamic Istanbul share family resemblances, so do they display affinities with the brands that other rising cities across the global South are seeking to establish. As in Cape Town, Mumbai, Beirut, or Shanghai, in Istanbul-cum-Constantinople, neo-imperial nostalgia meshes happily with globalism.

The touting of globally ascendant cities as microcosmic of their nation-states, moreover, underscores the degree to which these cities’ rise remains bound to national projects. First, their very role as nexus between the neoliberal global economy and national or regional dynamics means that such cities rely on strategic investment from their states. Ankara’s stake in Istanbul’s status, for example, was evident at the fetih celebrations in the bussing in of audiences from the provinces, the national security symbolism of the fighter plane display, and the endorsement of the country’s top leaders.

Second, as Çağlar Keyder observes in chapter 1 of this volume, national-level challenges can depress a city’s prospects regardless of its intrinsic dynamism. For Istanbul, this truth came home after 2016 as tourists stayed away because of stormy national politics and spillover from the Syrian conflict. Attacks on strategic sites in Istanbul by Kurdish insurgents and radical jihadists underscore the intertwined fate of global cites with their nation-states. *Daesh* (the so-called Islamic State or ISIS) attacks on Istanbul’s Atatürk airport on June 29, 2016, for
example, attest to terrorists’ cognizance that by sabotaging the gateway to Istanbul they would wound Ankara.

This climate dismays Istanbul’s capitalists and intelligentsia, who as champions of the Belle Époque and Ottoman-Islamic narratives represent a second, overlapping feature of the two projects: their social base. The Belle Époque story appeals to liberal businesspeople and intellectuals, relatively influential offshoots of a prosecular ruling class that has been eclipsed during AKP rule. Rising pro-religious business interests and intellectuals, on the other hand, tend to endorse the Ottoman-Islamic narrative. Nevertheless, both camps are winners from
globalization. They may cooperate or—given the paucity of conversation across epistemic communities—work independently toward the common goal of consolidating the city’s status as a hub of global neoliberalism. Collusion is evident in the comparable themes of events that they sponsor. Among these are the symposia series from which this volume emanates as part of a 2010 Istanbul European City of Culture program that implicitly trumpeted both the Belle Époque and Ottoman-Islamic stories.

Over the course of the 2000s such efforts yielded dividends. Istanbul was ranked regularly among the world’s top thirty cities in surveys like the Global
Cities Index. This performance is attributed to two functions at which the city excels. First, by virtue of its strategic “geocultural” location, Istanbul is a significant facilitator of global policy conversations. The role leverages its proverbial “bridge” status: linking geological formations like major straits and seas at one level, and political/civilizational blocs like “Europe” and the “Middle East” or the “West” and “Islam” at other levels. This narrative of exceptional geocultural traction has lent the city clout since at least the late nineteenth century and especially after the onset of the Cold War. A second, related source of strength according to global city indexes is that Istanbul’s business-intelligentsia nexus, which included some forty public and private universities in 2015, fosters human capital. Both roles are attested to by the high volume of business, civil society, and intergovernmental summits (e.g., NATO, OECD, UNDP) that Istanbul has hosted.

These twin functions have been compromised by the current political climate, raising questions about Istanbul’s ability to thrive in the short term. Both roles emanate, nonetheless, from structural rather than conjectural capacity. As Sassen observes, it is Istanbul’s inheritance at the intersection of North-South and East-West that makes it a natural arbiter in flows of trade, ideas, and people. Istanbul combines, as Göktürk et al. observe, the transnational “global city” role of coordinator of markets with older, imperial “world city” service as arbiter of intellectual and aesthetic exchange. In both cases, the neo-Ottoman tale of two cities supplies “narrative[s]” for putting Istanbul on the map of “global media, the art world . . . investors, discerning tourists, curators of exhibits, real estate developers . . . [and] sundry consumers of culture.”

Pathways to Pluralism

Both Belle Époque and Ottoman-Islamic Istanbul furnish frameworks, at least in principle, with which to live with difference. The Belle Époque pathway to coexistence is liberal cosmopolitanism. By inviting individuals to rediscover late Ottoman Istanbul in all its multiculturalism, the narrative encourages transcendence of latter-day Turkish ethnonationalism. Belle Époque Istanbul thus opens a space for meeting, but also for mourning, its own protagonists, the lost Ottoman non-Muslim peoples. To be sure, nostalgia for an idealized past can serve to gloss over its grim realities, as İlay Romain Örs argues in chapter 5 of this volume. Her warning is all the more salient as pressure mounts in Turkey on those who challenge taboos. Nevertheless, in the mid-2000s there were notable openings like the initiative of faculty at private Istanbul universities to debate long-verboten topics like genocide and the fate of the Ottoman Armenians. In principle the pluralizing of mental and political space underwritten by Belle Époque nostalgia also can encompass heterodox and nonpracticing Muslim identities. That said, the aspirations of, say, Turkey’s Alevi, leftist, or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) communities, may not always align seamlessly with (neo) liberal pathways to pluralism.
The Belle Époque frame further authorizes outreach to the pious Sunni elite and grassroots who arrived en masse in the city in recent decades. Engagement is based on treating Islamic observance as just one more expression of diversity to be governed by secular pluralism. This has been evident in liberal support for aspects of proreligious social movements since the 1980s. A case in point has been the search for acceptance of the headscarf in public spaces, a symbol of religiosity anathema to the Kemalist reading of secularism that until recently governed public life. Despite such openings, the secular, liberal framework authorized by Belle Époque cosmopolitanism may mesh awkwardly with Ottoman-Islamic claims to normative primacy.

Ottoman-Islamic Istanbul, after all combines affirmation of the neo-liberal subject with a faith-based and more communitarian orientation. A major inspiration is the millet system of hierarchal relationships between religious communities, which was used to manage diversity during the Ottoman golden era until its abrogation in the nineteenth century. In this framework, Sunni Muslims enjoyed preeminence regardless of their ethnic origin (e.g., Slav, Albanian, Laz, Circassian, Tatar, Kurdish, or Arab as well as Turkish).

At the same time non-Muslim groups were given communal autonomy maintained, as Feyzi Baban notes in chapter 3 of this volume, through intensive boundary-marking practices. As an approach to pluralism then, the millet system affirmed rather than ignored religious difference. Minorities thrived to the extent that the benign paternalism of the state—embodied in the person of the sultan—was indeed benign. By ensuring through differentiation that everyone knew their proper place, the framework was said to enable “harmonious relations in society.”

In today’s Ottoman-Islamic imaginary of the city, the neo-millet formula for living with diversity erases divisions between (Sunni) Muslims. This furnishes a fragile space for reconciliation of, say, Turkish and Kurdish ethnic identities. Such an approach was used to frame a now defunct peace process with Kurdish militant, political, and civic organizations. Yet it problematically ignores some non-Sunni sensibilities. Alevi discomfort with neo-Ottomanism, for example, was attested to by outrage at the naming of a massive infrastructural project—the third Bosphorus bridge—after Selim I (1470–1520), whose expansion of Ottoman rule over the Middle East entailed suppression of Alevi as a potential “fifth column” for the Shi’a shah of Persia.

At the same time, the Ottoman-Islamic approach acknowledges the difference of non-Muslim minorities in keeping with a neo-millet logic. Such recognition can lead to protection and the restoration of rights. During the 2000s, for example, an administration beholden to the Ottoman-Islamic narrative of Istanbul re instituted numerous properties belonging to non-Muslim foundations (vakıf; pl. evkáf), which had been confiscated by hardline Turkish ethnonationalists in the 1970s. Such policies may be why several prominent intellectuals of non-Muslim descent have thrown their weight behind the Ottoman-Islamic narrative.
Like any good story, the Ottoman-Islamic narrative of Istanbul can be interpreted in multiple ways. Its code of conduct, as evidenced by aspects of the fetih celebrations, also underwrites ethnoreligious nationalism. This can take the form of a bellicose and hegemonic rather than pluralistic and paternalistic Turkish-Islamist synthesis.\(^{47}\) In this form, the approach raises flags for both non-Muslims and Muslim religious “minorities” like heterodox Alevis and many a secular Sunni. On the basis of national voting patterns, such groups comprise at least one-quarter of the national electorate\(^ {48}\) and dominate vital quarters of the Istanbul city center.\(^ {49}\) Their concern is that neo-Ottomanist trumpeting of Turco-Muslim primacy will spur vigilantes if not the authorities to purge rather than protect the religiously nonconformist.

Such fears were amplified when a leading liberal of Armenian heritage, Hrant Dink, was assassinated as he walked to work along a fin de siècle Istanbul boulevard in 2007. A decade later they were further exacerbated when a nationwide campaign castigating people who celebrate “culturally alien” New Year’s Eve was followed by a Daesh attack on a cosmopolitan Istanbul nightclub in the early hours of January 1, 2017. Waking to the news of thirty-nine dead, citizens of secular orientation in particular began the new year with a sense of malaise.\(^ {50}\)

**Kozmopolitical Acts**

_Belle Époque_ and Ottoman-Islamic Istanbul are nonetheless pluralistic and inclusive in principle if not always in practice. Many an Istanbulite will describe this condition as _kozmopolit_ or “cosmopolitan.” The term, as Amy Mills shows in chapter 6 of this volume, has an old and ambivalent local genealogy. Many who call Istanbul home have long seen it as both _cosmos_—the embodiment of the human condition—and the quintessential _polis_, a term used by Greek Orthodox inhabitants to describe not just any but “the City.” This emic cosmopolitanism, as Örs puts it in chapter 5, is at once universalistic and particular, and remains a _leitmotif_ in Istanbulites’ self-understandings. The city, as such, offers a foil or “strategic space where our major challenges become acute and visible—a lens to see a larger world that remains difficult to grasp.”\(^ {51}\) As Erdoğan, who grew up in the historic inner-city neighborhood of Kasımpaşa, expressed with a flourish: “If you try to write history without recognizing Istanbul your ink will dry, your pen will become blunt.”\(^ {52}\) This native claim to embody the universal via the city’s particularity—a paradoxical expression of cosmopolitanism that is fiercely local—is one that contributors to this volume critically engage as they explore modes of conviviality in the city.

Their findings speak, in turn, to a growing literature that grapples with “actually existing cosmopolitanism” via empirical research.\(^ {53}\) The goal is to move beyond the blithe assumption of mutual recognition that runs through much liberal cosmopolitan thought.\(^ {54}\) Instead, this volume’s contributors draw on rich archival, literary, and ethnographic data to unpack multiple modes of grappling
with difference in Istanbul. Authors hail from across the humanistic social sciences—history, religious studies, geography, anthropology, and sociology—as well as political theory, political science, and political economy. Their interventions offer emplaced rather than *a priori*, contingent rather than definitive, windows onto the dynamics that shape the sharing of space in the city.

What the chapters have in common is the Arendtian intuition that the act of occupying city space is both political and performative.\(^5\) As Mumford wrote about New York in the 1930s, it is in “the city as theater” that our “more purposive activities are focused, and work out . . . into more significant culminations;” such outcomes are generated through the interactions of “conflicting and cooperating personalities, events, [and] groups.”\(^5\)\(^6\) Templates like *Belle Époque* and Ottoman-Islamic cosmopolitanism serve as scripts for these interactions. Yet they are open to improvisation by sundry actors on the city stage. Each performance, moreover, reinterprets the narrative generating “mixity”—a “constellation of trajectories”—which coalesces into new, often volatile ways of living with difference.

One such mode is that of the cosmopolitan subaltern who tenaciously fills the city’s rougher spaces. If the bourgeoisie, enamored of *Belle Époque* or Ottoman-Islamic Istanbul, exemplifies the cosmopolitanism of “frequent fliers,”\(^5\)\(^9\) Istanbul’s “rootless underclasses,” like de Certeau’s urban walker, also “constantly cross symbolic boundaries” to “negotiate their ways through the cityscape.”\(^6\)\(^0\) Hailing from Anatolia are Turkish and Kurdish migrants, mostly pious Sunnis but also Alevi, who impress a heterodox stamp on core Istanbul neighborhoods like Okmeydanı.

These internal relocations rub against documented and surreptitious arrivals from abroad. Economic migrants and asylum seekers, they serve as day laborers and waiters, housecleaners and caregivers. Cohabitation can cause tensions but also, as Kristen Sarah Biehl argues in chapter 8 of this volume, pragmatic and transformative interconnections—a multidiasporic conviviality. Uzbek nannies from Central Asia and Georgian drivers from the Caucasus mingle with West African bouncers and Moldovan maids.\(^6\)\(^1\) They are “acutely aware what different segments of the society [think] about them” but determined to “play with this difference in their own terms.”\(^6\)\(^2\) In so doing, they consume and produce the city’s *kozmopolitik* energies. A fraught “sense of urbanity” becomes “essential to their lives” even as they grapple with the exile’s nostalgia for a hometown or homeland left behind.\(^6\)\(^3\)

A massive influx of Syrians, moreover, is making its mark on Istanbul, the latest in a long line of refugee movements into and out of the city. From Sephardic Jews in the fifteenth century and Polish officers in the nineteenth, to White Russians on the eve and German Jews at the apex of the world wars, Istanbul always has offered a port to weather storms, even as it generates its own.\(^6\)\(^4\) As a 1922 pathfinder survey put it, “Constantinople, owing to its geographical situation and its political importance in the Near East, has been for many years and apparently
always will be the great center for all refugees from political or religious upheaval in the Near East,” conflicts “which render life difficult if not impossible where they occur.”

The management of intersecting identities that Istanbul requires is also inherently gendered. Decisions made every morning, like what a woman will wear, are governed by a visceral assessment of the cityscape to be traversed that day. On balance, more open attire is de rigueur in Beyoğlu or newer shopping districts like Bağdat Avenue, while conservative gear is appropriate to, say, Fatih. That said, the binary juxtaposition of veiled and unveiled women that so saturates media imagery of Istanbul belies the multiplicity of motives and audiences that women entertain. Mobilization over the past three decades by conservative women for the right to wear the veil in public universities, for example, was long pursued by invoking both liberal arguments for women’s inclusion in public spaces and (Ottoman-)Islamic morality.

Women’s mobilization is microcosmic of the challenges faced in generating solidarities more broadly. For example, a study of self-proclaimed activists from multiple political, religious, and ethnic backgrounds found that it was possible to form common platforms around “thin” shared values like preventing violence against women. However, there was considerable culturally driven disparity in the strategies advocated. So when mass protests unfurled in February 2015 to mourn the rape and murder of Özgecan Aslan, some organizers delighted in male allies’ move to march along Istanbul thoroughfares in miniskirts. The tactic garnered ample media coverage for the cause. But some proreligious activists worried that by defying traditional gender roles the skirted men had undermined the platform’s credibility in the eyes of other potential allies among conservatives. Nevertheless, advocates for women from across the identity spectrum repeatedly find ways to bring thousands onto the city’s streets to pursue overlapping visions of empowerment.

In recent years, such tense but creative encounters have shaped mobilizations of all colors and sizes. The liberal cosmopolitanism of Belle Époque nostalgia, for example, inflects demands—to date unrequited—to bring to justice the killers of Hrant Dink. Mustering thousands on the anniversary of his death, the movement also draws energy from contemporary symbols of transnational solidarity with the Other, such as black-and-white placards that read in multiple languages: “We are all Hrant; We are all Armenian.”

Another annual performance pushes the envelope of the Ottoman-Islamic narrative: the mass prayer—galvanized by a Sunni youth movement—held before Hagia Sophia on the anniversary of the fetih of Istanbul in 1453. The goal of participants is restoration of the great monument as a mosque. The sixth-century edifice served as a church for over 900 years, and then as a mosque for almost 500, but it has been a museum since 1935. To date, as Anna Bigelow examines in chapter 7 of this volume, the AKP authorities have only paid lip service to such demands. Changing Hagia Sophia’s status would outrage Christian interlocutors
around the world. It could call into question, moreover, Turkey’s commitment to the secular (neo)liberal order from which mainstream champions of Ottoman-Islamic nostalgia have benefited.

Appropriation of Istanbul’s tale of two cities is also evident in the coalitions, often counterintuitive, that can form when actors claim space in the city to “gain freedoms.” Impromptu alliances crystallized, for example, during the Gezi Park protests of 2013. The uprising was catalyzed by Turkey’s environmentalist movement, a cause mapped by Hande Paker in chapter 9 of this volume to a neoliberal Ottoman-Islamist project: the slated demolition of a city park. In its stead, the authorities planned to commemorate and commodify an earlier Ottoman site by building a replica to serve as a shopping mall. Opponents of the plan included an unexpected green-green alliance, as it were, for postmaterialist values, when anticapitalist Islamic youth joined secular environmentalists to resist neoliberal urban transformation. Yet protestors also leveraged tongue-in-cheek Ottoman-Islamic referents to their cause. A striking case in point was the performance of gas-masked, gender-bending whirling dervishes during the occupation of the park.

Still other groups mobilized not for a cause but against the heavy-handed police response to the initial protests. This yielded unexpected acts of solidarity between, for example, football fans and LGBTQ activists. As Susan C. Pearce documents in chapter 10 of this volume, the latter ably channeled energies from Gezi Park toward the annual Pride parade, which coincided in timing and locale with the broader protests. For years the only Pride parade held in a Muslim country, events were banned in 2016 due to “security concerns” and are unlikely to be permitted again in the near future.

To be sure, most impromptu acts of recognizing the Other prove ephemeral, as Sami Zubaida cautions in chapter 2 of this volume. Yet Benhabib’s work suggests that “iterative encounters” have the potential to transform political subjectivities. New coalitions indeed helped to shift national political trajectories as political parties sought to appropriate—or contain—the energies unleashed by Gezi and its aftermath. Over the course of municipal (2014), presidential (2014), and parliamentary (2015) elections, old and new cleavages became inflamed across the country.

At the same time, unprecedented political alliances were forged. One form this took was the campaign of the pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi; HDP) to harness the post-Gezi oppositional coalition. The bold move thrust the HDP into parliament in national elections on June 7, 2015, an outcome that cost the AKP its parliamentary majority. President Erdoğan responded by paving the way for snap elections less than five months later and peace talks with the Kurdish movement collapsed in a cycle of terrorism and reprisals.

The post-Gezi fallout within the proreligious camp between Erdoğan’s supporters and followers of the US-based preacher Fethullah Gülen was just as dramatic. The feud led on July 15, 2016, to a coup attempt allegedly spearheaded by
Gülenist elements. The putsch failed in part due to concerted opposition from across the otherwise polarized society: the AKP grassroots defied tanks and live ammunition, as liberal journalists and the leadership of all the major political parties—right wing, center left, and pro-Kurdish—rallied behind the government. At the cost of some 250 lives, the events proved a watershed moment in the emergence of Erdoğan’s New Turkey.

Within just three weeks, 50,000 passports were canceled; 18,756 people were detained and 10,192 arrested, including soldiers, police officers, judges, and prosecutors, according to the state news agency. In the months that followed, and under the auspices of emergency law, over 100,000 public employees were purged from the bureaucracy, especially from an education sector said to be a Gülenist stronghold. A significant number of those dismissed at the university level, moreover, had signed a petition protesting government policies toward Kurds. In widening waves, opposition political and media figures and institutions came under siege. This was evident in the arrest, en masse, of the HDP municipal and national leadership in the fall of 2016, the shuttering of some 160 media outlets, and the imprisonment, according to watchdog reports, of over a hundred journalists.

At the time of writing, the closing down of oppositional political space has been accompanied by co-optation of the ultranationalist right. These developments unfolded alongside a heated contest over a constitutional referendum that passed narrowly on April 16, 2017, and that may enable consolidation of President Erdoğan’s new order.

In many ways, the outcome is a victory for the more combative strain of Ottoman-Islamic Istanbul as microcosmic of Turkey. What then will happen to the constituents of the Belle Époque and other visions of collective identity? Indeed, what will become of the Ottoman-Islamic narrative’s inclusive thrust at a time when the frame is increasingly employed to champion an exclusionary ethnoreligious nationalism?

Whatever the answer to these questions, Istanbulites will prove resilient. If there is anything on which rival claimants to the city agree, it is that Istanbul—and the stage it supplies to enact diversity—is more enduring than efforts to eliminate it under any regime, imperial and national alike. After all, Istanbul’s neo-Ottoman tale of two cities at the dawn of the twenty-first century entails its own omissions, highlighting some stories and eliding others. The chapters in this volume seek to recover still more. They are an attempt to close our eyes, like Orhan Veli, and listen to what Istanbul and its people have to say—for better and for worse—about living together.

**Chapter Overview**

 Çağlar Keyder’s contribution launches the volume with an overview of the platform for pluralism that the city has provided for centuries. At the intersection of historical sociology and political economy, he examines urban cosmopolitanism
as an empirical description and normative category across Istanbul’s nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. In the fin de siècle period, he argues, earlier multicomunitarian pluralism began to evolve into a more individualistic cosmopolitanism. Both forms of living with diversity, however, were eclipsed by the triumph of nationalism in the twentieth century. Examining Istanbul’s subsequent bid to rise through the ranks of global cities, Keyder questions the prospect of consolidating recent cosmopolitan gains given Turkey’s increasingly restrictive political environment.

Illuminating Keyder’s story in rich historical and sociological detail, Sami Zubaida examines Istanbul as a meeting place of Middle Eastern cosmopolitanisms during the Belle Époque. A “promiscuous” cosmopolitanism, he shows, infused the city’s subcultures but was eclipsed by the transition to Turkish ethnonationalism. Is this pattern, he asks, being repeated in Istanbul’s recent cosmopolitan renaissance and its encounter with a resurgent Turkish-Islamist synthesis?

Feyzi Baban expands on the historical relationship between multiculturalism and prospects for living together today. He shows that despite today’s romanticism about the city’s pluralistic past, cohabitation in the nineteenth century did not mean empathy across communal divides. Baban demonstrates this via three literary pieces that evoke, in turn, the sensibilities of Ottoman Muslim elites whose moonlit entertainments along the Bosphorus rarely brought them into contact with counterparts among the Belle Époque Greek bourgeoisie. Wealthy Greeks, for their part, rarely mingled with the Orthodox working class in the city’s shabbiest districts. Baban argues that the self-contained nature of these communities—their dearth of mutually transformative interactions—makes Ottoman pluralism a historical artifact rather than a model for the present. It nonetheless spurs us to think about pluralism in refreshingly decentered ways.

Charles King moves us forward temporally and expands our perspective geographically by comparing cosmopolitanism, violence, and the state in Istanbul and Odessa. Noting that robust research indicates that while purveyors of violence seek to portray it as a natural outgrowth of incommensurable identities, large-scale social conflict—from riots to genocide—rarely takes place without state complicity. Examining the relationship between intercommunal relations and state policies in prewar Istanbul and Odessa, he surveys two urban environments in which diversity was decimated in the twentieth century. King’s argument is that successful sustenance of diversity requires a constant effort to privilege the suffering of others over one’s own. This demands embracing “one’s own cultural discomfort” toward building “a set of social networks and institutions which make the fate of other communities an inextricable part of one’s own destiny.”

Engaging the fates of others, however, is challenging even for the well-intentioned. As İlay Romain Örs’s exposé of “cosmopolitanist” nostalgia for Belle Époque Istanbul reveals, rosy-eyed portrayals of the period often gloss over its aftermath: the persecution and expulsion of the communities in question. Seeking via their exilic literature to recover the “actually lived” cosmopolitanism of
the Greek Orthodox community of Istanbul (*Rum Polites*), Örs recovers an emic cosmopolitanism derived, as she puts it, from “their Istanbul roots, not from their world travels.”

Amy Mills expands the search for “situated knowledge” of the Other in conversation with leading theorists. Her chapter offers a critique of renowned geographer David Harvey’s curious elision of emplaced knowledge in his work on cosmopolitanism. In its stead, she invokes Doreen Massey’s notion of “throwntogetherness” as a frame with which to capture both local particularity and its globally interconnected production—the ways that “here” is shaped by “there.” She does so by surveying historical and nostalgic accounts of *Belle Époque* cosmopolitanism, culminating with an ethnography of “neighboring” practices among local women today. Such acts of mutual recognition, she affirms, are “contingent upon careful negotiation and are vulnerable to heightened moments of state nationalism or global crisis.” The sharing of space, she concludes, is a negotiation “in process, always fluctuating, filled with promise as well as vulnerability.”

Picking up these tensions, Anna Bigelow explores the perennial contest for Hagia Sophia: a church, a mosque, or a museum, depending on one’s vantage point. The chapter draws on archival, textual, and ethnographic research to trace three moments of transition in the building’s 1,400-year history: from church to mosque (in 1453), from mosque to museum (in 1934), to debates today driven by Ottoman-Islamist enthusiasm to reconvert Hagia Sophia into a mosque. Each moment, Bigelow argues, reveals the cosmopolitan power of the monument to absorb diverse worldviews. Yet each set of claims—Orthodox and Islamic as well as the secular, liberal UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) regime for world heritage sites—also radiates a universality that is, paradoxically, exclusionary.

Turning from the grandeur of Hagia Sophia, Kristen Sarah Biehl addresses the granular realities of neighboring Kumkapı, a transitory home to migrants from across the country and globe. Based on ethnographic immersion, Biehl’s chapter explores how housing practices engender a certain “conflicted openness”: a form of conviviality that can be grudging but which nevertheless underwrites a pragmatic cosmopolitanism.

The generation and management of crosscutting solidarities is also examined in Hande Paker’s account of opposition to Istanbul’s third Bosphorus bridge. She argues that environmental struggles like the anti-bridge movement offer fruitful sites with which to ground the project of cosmopolitan citizenship in concrete relations of solidarity, conflict, and political action. Examining local and transnational sources of activism, she shows that the anti-bridge campaign generated referents that went on to inform the Gezi Park movement. Paker suggests that cosmopolitical encounters catalyzed by exigency and *ad hoc* solidarities can open the door to transformative fusions of “local” and “universal” values.

Susan Pearce wraps up the volume by exploring an explosive moment of urban performance during the summer of 2013: Istanbul’s trans and LGBT Pride
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parades, which unfolded in tandem with the Gezi Park protests. She examines how activists’ “presence—and the insistence on the right to be present—interacts with the ethnic and religious social identities of other urban denizens.” Her findings suggest that political cross-fusions generated at least a “momentary intensity” that “forwarded the project of gender and sexuality inclusion.” Closing with words resonant for the volume as a whole, Pearce argues that “far from a cosmopolitan patina over a canvas of historically entrenched ethnic divisions,” Istanbul reveals plural, if volatile, paths to living in diversity.

NOTES


2. Notions like “conquest” (fetih), and “justice” or (adalet) are core elements of Turkish political Islam’s revisionist lexicon of history and the will to achieve a culturally “authentic” modernity. The marriage of that tradition with a neoliberal economic agenda is inscribed in the very name of the Justice and Development Party or Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP).


5. A productive way to read about Pamuk’s Istanbul is through the eyes of his translators; see, for example, Erdağ M. Göknar, Orhan Pamuk, Secularism and Blasphemy: The Politics of the Turkish Novel (New York: Routledge, 2013).


11. In recent years a prosecularist strand of nostalgia has also emerged for early republican Istanbul as a site of Westernist modernity, early secularist leaders’ preference for Ankara notwithstanding. As Orhan Pamuk’s oeuvre suggests, such nostalgia—apparent in commodified imagery of beauty pageants and shopping boulevards, balls, and tramways—is nevertheless enmeshed in a melancholic sense of both the echoes and the erasure of the late Ottoman social fabric.


18. Precise figures are difficult to ascertain, but a widely cited source for the Ottoman period is Kemal Karpat, Ottoman Population 1830–1914: Demographic and Social Characteristics (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985). Contemporary non-Muslim numbers are taken from the US State Department website (https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2004/35489.htm), which cites 65,000 Armenians, 25,000 Jews, and 3,000 Greek Orthodox for officially recognized minorities, and an estimated 10,000 Baha’is, 15,000 Syriac Christians, 5,000 Yazidis, and 3,000 Protestants, among other tiny denominations.


23. Çınar, Modernity, Islam and Secularism.


29. Çınar, Modernity, Islam and Secularism.


37. The Global Cities Index (2011; http://documents.mx/education/global-city-index.html) suggests that to establish and maintain global financial traction a city must be able to draw and keep a well-educated population, provide infrastructure for the circulation of information, foster social openness to debate and criticism, project “soft” cultural power, and contribute to policy dialogues.


This figure is based on the assumption that the 20–25 percent of the national vote typically garnered by the CHP in the past decade is cast by prosecularist Sunni and heterodox Alevi voters, though such groups also vote for other parties (the Nationalist Movement Party [MHP] and the pro-Kurdish HDP, and in some instances the AKP). Also, far from all prosecularist CHP voters are concerned with religious minorities’ rights.

Electorally: Beşiktaş, Şişli, and Kadıköy.


For a study of the gendered nature of migrant labor to Turkey see Mine Eder, “Turkey’s Neoliberal Transformation and Changing Migration Regime: The Case of Female Migrant Workers,” in Social Transformation and Migration: National and Local Experiences in South Korea, Turkey, Mexico and Australia, ed. Stephen Castles, Derya Özkul, and Magdalena Cubas (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 133–150.

Tuominen, “Clash of Values,” 44.

Ibid.

For a compulsively readable account of Istanbul in this period see Charles King, Midnight at the Pera Palace: The Birth of Modern Istanbul (New York: W. W. Norton, 2014).


68. Cases in point include joint strategizing and advocacy regarding proposed penal code reform, such as joint action against a bill that would have pardoned child rapists if they married the girls in question. See “Turkey Withdraws Child Rape Bill after Protests,” *BBCNews*, November 22, 2016, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38061785.


71. Previously, the HDP had fielded its candidates as independents to circumvent Turkey’s high, 10 percent electoral threshold.


