

Translating Cultures Theme



**OTTOMAN PASTS, PRESENT CITIES:
COSMOPOLITANISM AND TRANSCULTURAL MEMORIES**

AHRC RESEARCH NETWORK

Outline of research

- Transcultural exchange in cities of former Ottoman Empire
 - Baghdad to Belgrade, etc.: comparative approach
 - Urban space foments cultural exchange
- Period focus on 1780s-present: from competing imperialisms, to contemporary sectarianisms:
 - Iraq, Israel, Bosnia, Croatia, Turkey, Cyprus, Crimea, etc.
 - Cultural exchange between *past and present* ('memories')
- Interdisciplinary network made of 'transcultural' disciplines:
 - Cultural History, English/Humanities, Literature, Life-writing and autobiography, Visual Culture, French-Francophone/North-African and Levant studies, Anthropology, Architecture and Urban Studies etc.; also musicians, art curators, film makers
- Ottoman Empire as a relative model of multiculturalism



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Contribution to Translating Cultures Theme.

1. Theoretical – Transcultural approach (John McLeod, Edhem Eldem *et al*)
 - Ottoman cities thrived on diversity/plurality, while also ensuring boundaries maintained and respected between co-existing communities (until late period)
 - Points of commonality between ethnic and religious groups.
 - Fissures and points of tension/conflict, perpetual negotiations at the intersections between cultures, between contact zones.
 - Multidirectional, local/international, political/historical/cultural frames surrounding Ottoman cities, then and now.
2. Literal - 'translating' academic research/practice into wider arena through impact and external engagement activities.

EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT:

- Our investment in this project was very much aroused by ' external engagement' and in part motivated by impact
- The exhibition 'East and West: Visualising the Ottoman City' (June 2014) is to be a key event in terms of external
- As Visual Advisor, research and networking have highlighted the importance of archives in order to reactivate neglected cultural heritages rich with transcultural exchanges

Also part of our external engagement:

- Jay Prosser/Project with Dialogue Society (Leeds)
- Gabriel Koureas/ Armenian Institute : 'Armenians in the Ottoman Empire'



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Challenges to Developing the Network

- Absence of inter-disciplinary research and a methodological framework in relation to the Ottoman Empire and the challenges this posed to the network.
- Identifying academics and other participants who are in tune with our basic aims. Some participants were discouraged by the lack of a disciplinary focus.
- The network has attracted many from outside the academic world which excellent from one perspective posed a number of challenges.



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Network's contribution to future research

- Interdisciplinary research by non-Ottoman specialists, including new arts and humanities models of cultural exchange ('transcultural turn,' 'postmemory,' 'multidirectional memories') producing genuinely new knowledges of Ottoman Empire.
- Comparative research takes Ottoman Empire from monolithic to plural signification. Network intervenes in Western media representation of Ottoman as 'Islamic' Empire.
- Interrogation of structure of empire: a federation of states? Comparative research (Ottoman versus 'national' models of empire) might be developed: e.g. Austro-Hungarian/Ottoman.
- Injecting Ottoman Empire into postcolonial studies. Formation of Empire that revises postcolonial theory, namely through transcultural.



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