The Conference

The demise of the Ottoman Empire and its ethnic, religious and social fabric in the 1910s is not only a defining event in the history of the Middle East and Europe and of global history. It is also a period of massive destruction, human suffering, and squandered opportunities for peace. We hence have proposed the term “cataclysm” to highlight both the destruction and the new beginnings witnessed in this period. The demise of Ottomanity as the utopia of a non-sectarian and inclusive notion of modern citizenship continues to haunt the societies and political institutions in the Middle East and the Balkans. This conference discusses current debates on World War I in the Ottoman world and possible impacts of this revisionist historiography on the history-writing of wider Europe and the Middle East. It focuses on domestic mass destruction – the Armenian genocide – as well as on the latter’s context and aftermath. It presents the state of research on the war government of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP); on the episodes of genocide in Asia Minor and in Syria; on long-term effects on victims and perpetrators – Armenians, Syriacs, Kurds, Turkey in general, and the Kurdish-Alevi-Armenian region of Dersim in particular. It also seeks to ascertain legal and literary perspectives on the new quality of violence. Despite the growing critical literature on the last years of the Ottoman Empire, we still lack a comprehensive historical narrative of this Cataclysm – of which scenes are re-enacted in our days in the same geography.

For the academic team of the project cluster “Ottoman Cataclysm”, 2012–2023: Hans-Lukas Kieser (Universities of Zurich and Newcastle NSW), Kerem Öktem (University of Graz) and Maurus Reinkowski (University of Basel).

Venue and logistics

Registration:
Public lectures and roundtables are open to all. If you are interested to attend the conference panels, please register your interest with Fabienne Meyer.

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Conference language: English

Venue:
Universität Zürich Zentrum
Rämistrasse 71
8006 Zürich
Room: KOL G-217
(Saturday, 31 October: KO2 F150)

Public Transport:
Tram 10 to ETH/Universitätsspital, Tram 9 to Kantonsschule

International Conference

Ottoman Cataclysm:
Total War, Genocide and Distant Futures in the Middle East (1915-1917)

28 – 31 October 2015
University of Zurich

Sponsors and collaboration:
Swiss National Science Foundation, Centre for the History of Violence at the University of Newcastle NSW, UZH Hochschulstiftung, ZUNIV, Dr. Wilhelm Jerg-Legat, Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Basel, The Centre for Southeast European Studies at the University of Graz, Research Foundation Switzerland-Turkey
Programme

Wednesday, 28 October
Welcome, 18:15. Prof. Dr. Andreas H. Jucker, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, UZH

Public lecture, subsequent. Donald Bloxham (Edinburgh): Geopolitics, ethnopolitics, mass murder: The Ottoman Cataclysm and western Eurasia’s long twentieth century of violence

Thursday, 29 October
Panel 1, 09:00-10.30. The Ottoman World War I and its historiography
Chair: Margaret Anderson (Berkeley)
Discussants: Erik J. Zürcher (Leiden)
Mustafa Aksakal (Washington D.C.): New scholarship, new directions
Nazan Maksudyan (Istanbul): New approaches of social history
Elizabeth Thompson (Charlottesville VA): Arab historiography

Panel 2, 10:50-11:30. Çanakkale 1915. Foundational myths of Young Turks, Kemalists, Australians and neo-Ottomanists
Chair: Philip Dwyer (Newcastle NSW)
Discussants: Elizabeth Thompson (Charlottesville VA)
Erol Körüoğlu (Istanbul): The triumph of Gallipoli, 1915. Uses and misuses in Turkey
Daniel Marc Segesser (Bern): Short input on myths and memories of the Gallipoli War in transnational perspective

Panel 3, 13:30-17:30. The Armenian genocide, the Kurds and post-genocide Turkey
Chair: Mauro Reinkowski (Basel)
a. 13:30-14:30 The Caucasian front and the Armenian relocations
Peter Holquist (Philadelphia): The impact of Russian strategy and Russian policies on the Caucasus Front
Raymond Kévorkian (Paris): La planification des déportation. Nouvelles conclusions
Discussant: Uğur Ü. Üngör (Utrecht)
b. 15:00-16:00 The anti-Armenian policy in the eastern and central provinces
Mehmet Polateli (Istanbul): Robbing and murdering Christians. Local actors, jihad and the state in the eastern provinces
Hilmar Kaiser (Phnom Penh): Between massacre and resistance: Officers, bureaucrats and Muslim notables in Angora province during the extermination of Armenians
Discussant: Yuval Ben-Bassat (Haifa)
c. 16:30-17:30 From genocide to “post-genocide”
Namık Kemal Dinç (Istanbul) (in Turkish, paper transl. in English): Sözü tarihe göre Diyarbakır’dı soykınımın toplumsal örgütlenmesinde aktörler/ Kürtish responsibility and oral history
Talip Suciyan (Munich): Another historiography for Turkey: Can the survivor speak?
Discussant: Kerem Öktem (Graz)

Roundtable 1, Public Debate, 18:15. The Armenian genocide: New debates on Turkey, Germany, the Shoah, and the post-Ottoman Middle East
Chair: Dominik J. Schaller (Zürich)
With Hülya Adak (Istanbul), Margaret Anderson (Berkeley); Donald Bloxham (Edinburgh); Stefan Ihrig (Jerusalem); Hans-Lukas Kieser (Zürich)

Friday, 30 October
Panel 4, 09:30-11.00. How to deal with crimes against humanity?
Chair: Peter Holquist (Philadelphia)
Discussants: Donald Bloxham (Edinburgh), Raymond Kévorkian (Paris)
Daniel Marc Segesser (Bern): “Dementia est Imperium Ottomanorum”: War Crimes, Crimes against Humanity and the end of the Ottoman Empire
Hülya Adak (Istanbul): Denial as a contemporary reaction to the Great Crime
Valentina Calzolari (Geneva): Armenian literary responses to Metz Yeghern

Roundtable 2, Public Debate, 17:15. How to deal with crimes against humanity?
Chair: Kerem Öktem (Graz)
Discussants: Mustafa Aksakal (Washington D.C.)
Ozan Ozalcı (Paris): The Расon of Cataclysm: Mehmed Djavid Bey and an Emotional History of Late Ottoman Empire
Üğur U. Üngör (Amsterdam): Şükür Kaya
Hans-Lukas Kieser (Zürich): Talat Pasha and Germany
Erik J. Zürcher (Leiden): The parallel lifes of Kazim Ozalp, Şükür Kaya and Abdulhalik Renda

Saturday, 31 October
Chair and discussant: Uğur U. Üngör (Amsterdam)
Kazım and Nezahat Gündoğan (Istanbul): Screening of the documentary film Manastırın Çocukları / Children of the Monastery (75 min.)

Roundtable 3, Public Debate, 12:30-14.00. Turkey in the shadow of 1915: A year of contested remembering
Chair: Kerem Öktem (Graz)
With Ayşegül Altınay (Istanbul); Seyhan Bayraktar (San Francisco); Sossie Kasbarian (Lancaster)