

***Tarih: Graduate History Journal***  
**Second Issue: Identity**

**EDITORIAL**

The inaugural issue of *Tarih* was launched last year under the auspices of the Department of History at Boğaziçi University with the aim of initiating a unique and lively academic platform for graduate students to publish scholarly interviews, articles and book reviews in the field of history. *Tarih*, a peer-reviewed annual online graduate journal, covers a wide spectrum of topics, promoting world-historical and comparative perspectives from different methodological approaches in various periods and regions. Today we are pleased to publish our second issue on the broad, yet controversial, topic of “Identity”.

The topic of our second issue was inspired by fervent debates on “Turkish identity” related to the ongoing discussion of Turkey’s identity in both foreign and local political debates. In particular, there are the heated discussions around the European Union about whether Turkey is European or Asian, which point up one of the most critical aspects of the identity problem: dichotomization. Also relevant is the highly controversial and problematic Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code, which criminalizes insults against “Turkish identity,” and has been used to incriminate many writers, intellectuals and journalists. The deceased Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink and the winner of the Nobel Prize for literature, Orhan Pamuk, are only two intellectuals among many against whom the Article was used to bring charges. Though the wording of Article 301 was revised in 2008, (changing from insulting “Turkishness” into insulting “the Turkish nation”), following the assassination of Hrant Dink in January 2007 by a Turkish-ultra nationalist, the ambivalent idea of a “Turkish identity” has remained as a deep-rooted and traumatic identity crisis within the nation-building process of the country.

Identity is in fact one of the most talked about but least well-defined concepts in current theoretical discourse. Yet when the prolific British cultural theorist Raymond Williams first published his classic work *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*<sup>1</sup> in 1976, unlike the other buzzwords such as “alienation”, “culture”, “hegemony”, “ideology” and “society” whose modifications, influences and contemporary meanings were thoroughly explored, the word “identity” was not even present in the book. The analysis of the word had to wait for almost another thirty years until 2005 when another significant cultural study on contested keywords, *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*,<sup>2</sup> was published by three other prominent cultural theorists, Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg

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and Meaghan Morris, inspired by and dedicated to Raymond Williams. The concept is still a contested site and is often the central issue around which many academic and daily debates revolve; on social identity, personal identity, cultural identity, national identity, ethnic identity, gender identity, class identity and so on.

In common sense language, identity is linked to the sense of sameness, how one defines him/herself *vis-à-vis* others and him/herself. The word is formed from the Latin *idem* and *entitas*, meaning “same” and “entity”. The very concept has also played a central role in the way we idealize and think about our historical selves in a self-reflexive vision. While pre-modern identity can mostly be understood as a shared language, religion, culture and a myth of common past and ancestry, modernity has emphasized the “I” in identity, where the conscious, autonomous, rational and coherent individual is centered as the essence of all human activity. And within the discourse of postmodernism, identity has become a fashionable word, where it is emphasized as a multiplicity of politically, socially and culturally constructed identities, and where these identities, unlike modern identities, have become conceptualized as fluid, dynamic, contextualized, relational and ambivalent.

As such, the evolution within the meaning of the term “identity” invokes, *prima facie*, a linear historical “maturation” from a search for a common myth (in pre-modernity) to the construction of a rational individual (in modernity) and to a plurality of more liquid and ambiguous identities (in post-modernity). This rather teleological interpretation about the derivation of the concept, however, has its own limitations: The Nation-states, for instance, regarded as the most prominent product and the archetypical institution of modernity, have mostly searched for a myth of origin and common ancestry either in Middle Ages or antiquity (just as in pre-modern identity), highlighting one of the paradoxes of Nationalism; “the objective modernity of nations to the historians eye” is opposed by “their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists” as Benedict Anderson puts it.<sup>3</sup> Also, in our postmodern, twenty-first century world, we talk about the death of older modern universals, certainties and objective values and truths, and expect acceptance and inclusion of more dynamic and fluid identities. Yet in Turkey, Article 301 is still part of a package of modern expectations of a static, reductionist and objective definition of “Turkishness”, as if such a definition was *at all* possible. It is to the problems of identity/identities that the interviews and articles of this issue have been addressed; how identity is shaped and reshaped within the particularities of specific historical circumstances and social contexts.

We are happy to publish two interviews, three papers and five book reviews for our second issue. Our first interview is with Professor Suraiya Faruqi, regarded as one of the most prominent social and economical

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historians of the Ottoman Empire living today, and it was conducted in Istanbul by Saadet Özen. Among other interesting issues, Özen raised questions about Ottoman identity, historiography, archival and visual sources and national histories. The second interview was conducted with Professor Donald Preziosi, one of the leading scholars in the field of art history, theory and criticism. The interview took place during Preziosi's time in Istanbul as visiting professor at Boğaziçi University funded by the Paul Getty Foundation. It was such a great pleasure for Nilay Özlü and for myself to have the opportunity to talk to Preziosi about modernity, identity, museology, avant-garde art and urban semiology.

The interviews are followed by three articles which deal in different ways with the theme of identity; architectural identity, imperial identity, and national identity. The first paper "Identity in Transition: Eighth Century Sogdian Architecture" by Ayşe Esra Şirin explores how the arrival of Islamic culture in the seventh and eighth centuries transformed the local Sogdian material culture, particularly the architectural identity of the region. By looking at the palaces and temples of the three urban centers, namely Penjikent, Samarqand and Varakhsha, Şirin's study attempts to understand the meaning of this visual transformation through the impact of political and social changes brought firstly by the Umayyads and then by the Abbasids. Selim Güngörürler's paper "Governors, Authors and the Porte: Ottoman Perceptions and Policies during the Period Preceding the War of 1736-1739" discusses the Ottoman Empire's perception of itself and its European neighbors in the beginning of the eighteenth century. Güngörürler's paper shows us how the military defeats from the late seventeenth century onwards influenced the Ottoman foreign policy and how these withdrawals were dealt with in contemporary instructional writings before the 1737-9 Austria-Ottoman and 1736-9 Russo-Ottoman Wars. The third paper, "Modern Expectations: Demands for Reform by the Arabs in the Late Ottoman Empire" by Ceren Abi, elaborates the reform demands of the Ottoman Arabs in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Drawing critically on the late-Ottoman political stage, modernity and the relationship between the Committee of Union and Progress and the Arabs, Abi explores how religious, social, economical and ideological divisions among Arabs subverted their aim of creating a unified front against the Ottoman government.

We publish five book reviews for our second issue. Özde Çeliktemel-Thomen reviews *Les chiens d'Istanbul* (The Dogs of Istanbul), an important study of the history of stray dogs in Istanbul, with a particular focus on the Committee of Union and Progress government's dog massacre of 1910. Sinem Erdoğan reviews *The Second Ottoman Empire: Political and Social Transformation in the Early Modern World*, which presents a novel approach to the mostly ignored seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when Ottoman imperial grandeur is usually supposed to have declined. This is

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followed by Kerim Kartal's review of the recent edition of the famous 1986 book, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire*, regarded as one the first major works in the field of Byzantine history. Kartal also compares other major books in the field with the current 2010 edition of the book. Yan Overfield Shaw reviews *Ottoman Propaganda and Turkish Identity: Literature to during World War I*, a pioneering study of the role of literature and propaganda in Ottoman Empire during the First World War. And, finally, Gülay Türkmen-Derviřođlu reviews *Religious Politics and Secular States: Egypt, India and the United States*, a significant comparative study of the role of religion in politics and of the recent revival of influential religious movements in today's world.

Our journal is the fruit of a genuinely collaborative effort forged through countless hours of dialogue and labor. I am greatly indebted to the editorial board and anonymous referees throughout the whole of the publication process. We are simply delighted that our call for papers brought together wide range of topics and book reviews by such a talented group of authors, and we are grateful and thankful for their extensive work and commitment to our issue. We find it an honor and a pleasure to have the opportunity to interview Suraiya Faroqhi and Donald Preziosi, and we appreciate their time and inspirational responses to our questions. I gratefully acknowledge my special thanks to them for their enthusiasm and guidance. I thank Yasemin Baran for her help in transcribing Faroqhi's interview, Nilay Özlü for designing our journal cover and Yan Overfield Shaw for his comments and suggestions in helping me with editing. Finally, I thank Bođaziçi University, our institutional home, and the faculty members of the Department of History, for their interest and encouragement in our endeavor.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

<sup>2</sup> Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg, Meaghan Morris and Raymond Williams, *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso. 1991 [1983]), 5.

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