

Introduction.

Turkey's Ottoman Afterlives: Between Nostalgia and Amnesia

Empires do not vanish; they endure in fractured forms—sedimented in rituals, landscapes, institutional languages, and inherited silences. Decisively dissolved in 1924, the Ottoman Empire remains robust across vast post-imperial geographies. Its traces are not confined to archives or ruins but persist in reactivated forms: in the façades of restored mosques, in commemorative calendars, in culinary continuities, in political rhetoric, and the projection of cultural capital. These remainders constitute what might be called the Ottoman “afterlives”—not residues of a defunct order but dynamic elements in the present, selectively mobilised, strategically forgotten, and often vigorously contested.

This claim is neither historically inevitable nor universally recognised. It results from institutional efforts, discursive strategies, and state interventions aimed at shaping collective memory through schools, religious organisations, diplomatic gestures, and heritage policies. As Pierre Nora (1989) describes, the transformation of lived memory into lieux de mémoire—symbolic constructs where communities rehearse identity and erase difference—illustrates how the Ottoman past is sustained not through continuity but through performance.

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Turkey's contemporary investment in the imperial past operates through a distinctive repertoire of gestures, sites, and narratives that project a mythologised vision of Ottoman glory. This reactivation is not merely nostalgic. It is also functional. It provides ideological scaffolding for regional ambitions and domestic legitimacy, grounding political elites' actions in a civilisational inheritance narrative. It enables the Turkish state to articulate itself as a regional power with deep historical roots and a moral mission to reconnect with former peripheries.

However, the Ottoman past is far too plural to be contained by a single memory regime. Across the thirty-plus successor states that once belonged to the empire, imperial legacies are interpreted, remembered, or resisted profoundly differently. People remember the empire with ambivalence: some view it as a source of order and pluralism, while others see it as a regime of neglect or domination. In Palestine and the Arab Levant, many still associate the Ottoman administration with marginalisation and economic underdevelopment. In North Africa, although the more recent trauma of European colonialism tends to overshadow Ottoman suzerainty, some still invoke the Ottoman past in debates about Islamic authenticity and geopolitical alliances. In the Balkans, communities simultaneously express imperial nostalgia and anti-Ottoman sentiment, sometimes even within the same commemorative events. This multiplicity of narratives highlights a fundamental feature of imperial afterlives: people always situate them within specific historical and cultural contexts.

Remembering and forgetting are not symmetrical (Connerton 2008). Historians, communities, and institutions produce historical meaning by preserving certain elements and excluding others.

Turkish neo-Ottoman discourse, while outwardly expansive, operates through a structure of selective erasure: Armenians, Arab Christians, Ottoman Jews, Kurdish insurgents, and others are often marginalised or reduced to decorative elements within an aestheticised imperial tableau. These silences are not omissions; they are conditions of legibility for the dominant narrative.

The early Republican project, rooted in Kemalist secularism and nationalism, was premised on a radical rupture with the Ottoman past.

Many portrayed the imperial legacy as a burden to overcome, linking it to backwardness, religious obscurantism, and geopolitical decline. Educational systems, public ceremonies, and architectural projects institutionalised this foundational rejection by actively removing Ottoman symbols from urban spaces.

In recent decades, however, this paradigm has shifted—especially under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Justice and Development Party

(*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* – AK Parti). Today, many celebrate the empire as a golden age and promote its revival through symbolic and material acts, such as the 2020 reconversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque that redefines national identity and religious belonging.

As Achille Mbembe (2001) noted, postcolonial polities often reengage with imperial signs not to restore them but to appropriate their symbolic capital. The Ottoman referent serves multiple ends: it softens the narrative of secular rupture, offers a religiously infused idiom of civilisational grandeur, and repositions Turkey within a broader Islamic and non-Western sphere of influence. Nevertheless, this symbolic condensation is inherently unstable. The same Ottomanism that appeals to Balkan Muslims may provoke discomfort among Arab or Kurdish nationalists. What we see, then, is a proliferation of affective registers in which the empire means different things to different audiences.

In this landscape of contested resonance, Ottoman memory acquires its political charge. It becomes a terrain of symbolic competition, where actors negotiate claims to legitimacy, identity, and belonging through references to an imperial past that neither dies nor remains neutral. In this process, people construct the past more than they remember—making it meaningful through restoration, narration, and display practices. As Benedict Anderson (1983) reminds us, all communities imagine themselves and assemble their histories retroactively to fit the contours of present desire. Neo-Ottoman discourse operates precisely through such retroactive assembly: it crafts an imperial imaginary that serves presentist functions, projecting unity where multiplicity exists, grandeur where conflict persists, and continuity where ruptures appear.

Authorities restore Ottoman monuments, revive old toponyms, and re-inscribe urban landscapes with imperial aesthetics. As Jeremy Walton (2016) has shown, this re-inscription often occurs in ambiguous sites: neighbourhoods oscillate between preservation and erasure, mosques function as heritage and political theatre, and cemeteries linger as affective archives. These spaces carry memory and serve as stages where people enact, contest, and occasionally subvert memory. They reveal that imperial afterlives do not passively inherit but actively engage with temporality, authority, and identity.

Neo-Ottoman Repertoires: Religion, Affect, and Hegemony

Ottoman memory in the twenty-first century is not merely an academic concern or a matter of national heritage. It functions as a repertoire—a flexible and ideologically versatile grammar—through which Turkey articulates its

domestic and international agendas. At the heart of this repertoire lies a significant religious dimension. Ottoman Islam, reimagined through the institutions and discourse of the contemporary Turkish state, serves as both an idiom of legitimacy and a tool of soft power. It builds on deep historical continuities in the fusion of religious authority and political sovereignty while adapting them to the conditions of the postcolonial present.

The Diyanet, Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs, is central to this apparatus. Established in 1924 to control and regulate Islam within the secular Kemalist framework, the Diyanet has undergone a profound transformation under AKP governance. Its budget, personnel, and international reach have expanded dramatically, turning it into a vehicle of transnational religious diplomacy. In sub-Saharan Africa, the Balkans, and Central Asia, Diyanet-funded mosques, schools, and training programmes export a version of Islam that is Hanafi in jurisprudence, Sufi-inflected in style, and aligned with Turkish national interests. Observers often frame this religious infrastructure as a continuation of Ottoman cosmopolitanism—a narrative of spiritual kinship that colonialism ruptured, and Turkey seeks to rehabilitate through its benevolent re-engagement (Mandaville 2007).

However, this narrative, though effectively potent, is riddled with contradictions. The discourse of ummah solidarity—frequently invoked to justify these initiatives—obscures the asymmetries of power that structure the relationships between the centre and peripheries. While Turkey presents itself as a civilisational anchor, offering Islamic renewal to former Ottoman lands, these interventions often reinforce knowledge, authority, and development hierarchies. The flow of clerical personnel, religious texts, architectural models, and funding is unidirectional, mainly casting Turkey as the authoritative centre of Sunni Islam. In practice, this religious diplomacy may reproduce a new form of post-imperial tutelage cloaked in shared history and moral leadership rhetoric. Moreover, such frameworks risk marginalising local agencies, portraying actors in contexts such as those across Africa as passive recipients rather than active participants in shaping these engagements.

This dynamic resonates with Achille Mbembe's (2001) analysis of postcolonial sovereignty, in which the past is not simply remembered but remobilised through aesthetic and affective means. In the Turkish case, neo-Ottomanism operates through an "aesthetic of power": a set of images, symbols, and performances that generate legitimacy by staging continuity. The reconstruction of Ottoman monuments abroad, from Sarajevo to Mogadishu, is emblematic of this logic.

At home, this aesthetic is no less pervasive. Public space in Turkey has undergone a gradual neo-Ottomanisation: new mosques emulate classical Ottoman design, Ottoman motifs proliferate in urban ornamentation, and televised historical dramas—such as *Diriliş: Ertuğrul*¹ or *Payitaht: Abdülhamid*²—romanticise the empire’s martial and spiritual virtues. These representations are not neutral recollections but affective investments to cultivate a sense of civilisational pride, religious rootedness, and historical destiny. As Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) argues, people always invoke the past through the lens of the needs and anxieties of the present.

Hagia Sophia’s reconversion from museum to mosque in 2020 was not simply religious. It was a carefully choreographed political gesture: a reassertion of Islamic sovereignty, a symbolic rupture with the secular legacy of the Republic, and an effective condensation of neo-Ottoman aspirations. As Erdoğan declared during the opening ceremony, the act marked “the resurrection of Hagia Sophia”,³ linking the moment explicitly to the conquest of 1453 and implicitly to a broader project of national restoration. Here, architecture becomes narrative, and history becomes spectacle—folded into a performance of triumph and piety.

However, this performance is not universally resonant. In parts of the Arab world—particularly Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon—many actors respond to Turkish neo-Ottoman gestures with scepticism or outright hostility, drawing on enduring narratives that frame Ottoman rule as a history of neglect, coercion, and cultural domination.

The Tanzimat-era reforms, often celebrated in Turkish historiography as moments of imperial modernisation, are remembered elsewhere as Turkification and administrative centralisation tools. Likewise, the pan-Islamist policies promoted during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II are interpreted as a means of suppressing Arab agency.

Turkey’s invocation of Ottoman heritage in these contexts often operates less as an offer of fraternal re-engagement and more as a deliberate projection of hegemony.

Local Islamic traditions, political actors, and civil society organisations often selectively appropriate Turkish support while resisting its ideological packaging. Ottoman legacies circulate in multiple idioms, refracted through national histories, sectarian divides, and global realignments.

As Bryant (2016) reminds us, the multiculturalisation of the past—a common trope in neo-Ottoman rhetoric—often romanticises coexistence while effacing

the structural violence accompanying imperial administration. The invocation of Ottoman pluralism, framed as a model for contemporary tolerance, obscures the asymmetries that marked the millet system and the repressions of late imperial decline. It transforms complex histories of conflict and negotiation into harmonious tableaux that serve the needs of contemporary diplomacy.

This instrumentalisation of memory extends beyond foreign policy. It delegitimises secular opposition, reframes national identity in Islamic-imperial terms, and positions the state as the guardian of spiritual authenticity. It also reconfigures gender roles and cultural expectations, celebrating traditional family structures and idealising female figures such as imperial consorts or mothers of sultans as moral anchors. In this way, Ottoman imagery becomes a means of governing the present—not only geopolitically but ethically and socially.

In sum, neo-Ottomanism is not a coherent ideology but a repertoire: a fluid, polyvalent set of references that accommodate paradoxes. It blends anti-colonial critique with imperial nostalgia, Islamic revivalism with statist nationalism, and affective mobilisation with realpolitik. Its effectiveness lies precisely in its ambiguity. As Ernesto Laclau (2005) argued, hegemonic discourse works not by resolving tensions but by articulating them under a floating signifier. Neo-Ottomanism performs this function, aggregating disparate demands—from Balkan Muslims to Turkish conservatives, from African clerics to disillusioned Arab youth—under the evocative banner of a shared imperial past.

Foreign Policy shifts and the rise of Ottoman nostalgia in the AKP era

Since the first AKP government mandate in 2002—and even more so with its subsequent drift toward competitive authoritarianism (Esen, Gümüşçü 2016)—Turkey’s foreign policy has undergone significant changes. In his roles first as a foreign policy advisor, then as Minister of Foreign Affairs (2009–2014), and finally as Prime Minister (2014–2016), Ahmet Davutoğlu formulated an ambitious foreign policy based on a multipolar worldview and on principles such as “zero problems with neighbours” and strengthening Turkey as an emerging regional power. Davutoğlu laid out these principles in his manifesto *Strategic Depth* (*Stratejik Derinlik*), positioning Turkey as a regional mediator.

In the early years of AKP governance, Turkey appeared consistent with these goals, strengthening economic and diplomatic ties with neighbouring

countries and asserting itself as an influential player in the MENA region and Africa. However, this initial phase of soft power took a sharp turn in the 2010s, with Turkish involvement in the conflicts in Syria and Libya and the increasing militarisation of foreign policy. The failure of the “zero problems with neighbours” policy—particularly regarding Syria—and the growing rift with Western powers led to a realignment of Turkish foreign policy.

This term, neo-Ottomanism, has often been used—particularly in non-academic literature—ambiguously and vaguely to describe Turkey’s attempt to reconnect with its imperial Ottoman past, using this historical reinterpretation to redefine its current foreign policy role in the post-Ottoman space. Scholarly literature, however, has provided a more nuanced and complex perspective on the concept of “Neo-Ottomanism,” closely linking it to the theme that inspires this volume: Ottoman nostalgia—or Ottomania, using the term coined by Murat Ergin and Yağmur Karakaya (2017). Recent scholarship (Ergin & Karakaya 2017; Yavuz 2020; Canan-Sokullu 2020; Kutlay & Öniş 2021) interprets ‘neo-Ottomanism’ not as a coherent strategic doctrine like *Strategic Depth*, but as a rhetorical device central to Turkey’s nationalist-populist-Islamist discourse. It aims to appeal to nationalist and patriotic sentiments, increasingly acting as the glue holding together the diverse political and social coalition that supports Erdoğan’s power.

The concept of neo-Ottomanism predates the AK Parti’s era. In the 1980s, Prime Minister Turgut Özal initiated reinterpreting Turkish identity about the Ottoman past, aiming to replace the ideal of Turkish identity constructed by the Kemalists. As Sedat Laçiner (2003: 172) notes, through this reinterpretation of the Ottoman past, Özal sought to portray the possibility of a new international role for Turkey—one that aspired to greater influence abroad, especially among its immediate neighbours. Esra Özyürek (2006) also analysed neo-Ottomanism in the 1990s, particularly during the 75th anniversary of the Republic. Observing the celebrations of the 75th anniversary of the Republic, Özyürek writes that even then, supporters of a neo-Ottomanist vision promoted, in a nostalgic sense, a reimagining of the Ottoman Empire as evidence of the superior results of a Turkish state that embraced Islam as its official religion. Much like Özal, this early neo-Ottomanist historical revisionism began to mark a growing departure from the secular Kemalist narrative, paving the way for integrating Islamic identity into the public and political spheres.

As mentioned, Erdoğan and his AK Parti later fully embraced this nostalgic vision. With it came the reinterpretation and promotion—through not only

academic works but also literary, cinematic, and folkloric productions—of an Ottoman past portrayed as tolerant within its borders and operating as an Islamic imperial force externally, of which Turkey, as its heir, should be proud (Ergin, Karakaya 2017: 56–57). Davutoğlu himself had always rejected the negative interpretation of neo-Ottomanism, which Western media and analysts associated with a form of “Turkish-style” imperialism.

The transition to a more evident neo-Ottomanism, characterised by growing interventionism and nationalist rhetoric, was accelerated by regional crises such as the Syrian civil war and the threat of ISIS. As Yavuz (2020) points out, many authors agree in describing the neo-Ottomanist narrative at that time as a justification for a larger Turkish role in these regional crises and as a way to shift public attention from the corruption and authoritarianism increasingly dominating domestic discourse in the early 2010s. As the heir to an empire portrayed as both internally tolerant and externally strong in its Islamic identity, Turkey was depicted to Turks as an entirely legitimate actor—if not one entrusted with a historical mission—making them proud of their past and justified in aspiring to a leadership role in the region.

Despite internal criticisms, Erdoğan promoted a neo-Ottomanist and nostalgic reinterpretation that part of the electorate embraced as a symbol of national redemption and resistance against the West’s “othering” of Turkey (Hakan Yavuz 2020: 176) at a time when relations with the European Union and its leaders—especially Merkel and Sarkozy—grew increasingly strained.

Thus, the modern nationalism adopted by the AK Parti also took on a firm tone of *revanche*, drawing a parallel between the resentment of an Empire denied the status of a great geopolitical power due to European colonial penetration into Ottoman territories and the more recent frustration of a Turkey that felt excluded, discriminated against, and downsized in its aspirations by the European Union.

Objectives and Content of the Volume

The contributions in this volume draw upon the analysis and interpretation of the concept of nostalgia and neo-Ottomanism, understood not as a rigid or coherent doctrine but rather as an elusive and multifaceted term, serving purposes ranging from internal consensus-building to the legitimisation of (some) Turkish actions on the international stage.

Various authors contribute to the volume, which explores the link between nostalgia and contemporary politics. They examine how political actors use

memory as nostalgia for the Ottoman Empire to evoke a shared past and as a tool to promote Turkey's presence and role in Africa and the Middle East.

This volume analyses in depth the various aspects, implications, and instrumental uses of the nostalgic construction and narration of the Ottoman Empire: from Erdoğan's political rhetoric to the use of religion in Turkish diplomacy, the manipulation and reinterpretation of history for political ends, and Turkey's foreign policy actions along with their media and propaganda narratives.

To better organise the presentation and align it with the objectives summarised above, the contributions are grouped according to three thematic areas—three aspects of “Ottoman nostalgia” that the volume seeks to analyse and explore.

Specifically, the first two contributions address the theme of historical rewriting and the myth of the empire. Giorgio Ennas and Angelo Carlucci provide a valuable historical perspective on the term and concept of “Ottomanism,” comparing 19th-century Ottomanism with the 20th–21st-century Neo-Ottomanism. They highlight the fundamental differences between the two concepts and reflect on the slipperiness of using the term “neo-Ottomanism” as a modern re-proposal, which they argue is historically inaccurate and risks confusing two distinct periods and concepts.

Following that, Michelangelo Guida analyses the evolution of the Empire myth within Turkish conservatism and Islamism, focusing on intellectuals Ahmet Davutoğlu and İbrahim Kalın. By examining their role in reshaping Turkish identity to value Ottoman and Islamic heritage better, Guida problematises their actual impact on Turkish foreign policy, arguing that the AKP has often instrumentalised foreign policy for domestic legitimisation rather than following a clear imperial doctrine. He also analyses the role of Ottoman-Islamic rhetoric in legitimising political choices rather than guiding foreign policy orientation.

The following section focuses on mechanisms and examples of (re)constructing shared memory and identity based on nostalgia. Fulvio Bertuccelli explores the reconstruction of national identity and collective memory in Turkey by commemorating the Battle of Gallipoli. He shows how the memory of Gallipoli—initially tied to Atatürk's nationalist cult and Turkish military heroism—has been gradually reinterpreted with an Islamic and neo-Ottomanist charge. This reinterpretation illustrates how cultural production, including literature and cinema, has actively reshaped the official narrative, contributing to new national myths and the public debate on collective memory.

Carlo Sanna analyses Erdoğan's rhetoric regarding the reconversion of Hagia Sophia, linking it to the nationalist rhetoric of the so-called *milliyetçi-mukaddesatçılar* circles of the 1950s. He explores how the AK Parti's alliance with the ultra-nationalist MHP has pushed Erdoğan's discourse toward an increasingly nationalist agenda. The article underscores how Erdoğan's narrative draws on historical and cultural references rooted in Turkish nationalism, reinterpreted through Ottoman nostalgia to redefine Turkish national identity.

After examining the domestic implications of neo-Ottomanist discourse, the final part of the volume focuses on its impact on diplomacy and foreign policy. Karolína Lahučká's contribution serves as a perfect bridge between this and the previous section. It analyses how Erdoğan has used nostalgia for the Ottoman past and the values of Islamic civilisation to transform national identity and project an image of Turkey as a regional power historically responsible for peace and stability in the MENA region. The author explores the implications of this narrative for consolidating internal consensus, redefining national identity, and projecting Turkey as a regional leader on the international stage.

Nicola Melis analyses how Turkey uses Ottoman nostalgia to shape its foreign policy and strengthen its influence in Africa, using the evocation of the past as a strategic narrative to legitimise its contemporary ambitions. The contribution shows how; by selectively invoking an Ottoman past of supposed Islamic unity, Turkey presents itself as a historically connected partner to the regional actors targeted by its foreign policy—avoiding the colonial connotations linked to Western powers. This way, evoking the Ottoman past is an effective soft power tool, especially in North and East Africa, where shared Islamic values enhance Turkish diplomacy.

Finally, Iulia-Alexandra Oprea explores how, under AKP rule, Turkey has intensified its presence in Africa, especially after 2005. She analyses how traditional diplomacy has been complemented by faith-based diplomacy and an emphasis on Ottoman historical and religious heritage, which Turkey has used to promote rhetoric of cooperation and anti-colonialism in its interventions in sub-Saharan Africa.

Contested Pasts, Entangled Presents: Memory as Political Terrain

The Ottoman legacy is not a stable inheritance. It is a field of contestation—a mobile and often unstable set of meanings claimed by some, disavowed by

others, and reworked by many. These dynamics are played out between Turkey and its former imperial peripheries and within post-Ottoman societies. Local actors, both state and non-state, engage with Ottoman memory through varying strategies of commemoration, resistance, reappropriation, and silence. One of the most conspicuous dimensions of this contestation is the politics of exclusion.

Ottoman discourse, particularly as deployed by the Turkish state, is characterised by its selective remembrance. The plural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious fabric of the Ottoman Empire is evoked only to the extent that it supports a contemporary vision of cohesion and spiritual grandeur. As Connerton (2008) observes, all memory depends on acts of forgetting; omissions matter as much as commemorations. In the Turkish case, official narratives actively erase or marginalise Armenians, Assyrians, Arab nationalists, Kurdish uprisings, and Ottoman Jews—figures and communities whose histories disrupt the triumphalist imaginary of imperial benevolence and civilisational leadership. This curated amnesia is not unique to Turkey. In Lebanon and Syria, memories of Ottoman rule are filtered through the lenses of Arab nationalism and French colonial historiography, often portraying the empire as oppressive or culturally alien. In the Balkans, popular narratives oscillate between celebrating Ottoman architecture and legal order and commemorating anti-Ottoman resistance as the crucible of national identity. In North Africa, political and cultural narratives often subsume the Ottoman legacy under broader Islamic memory and downplay its distinctiveness in favour of anti-colonial nationalism or pan-Arab ideologies.

At the same time, Ottoman afterlives are not exhausted by state projects or institutional discourse. They are inhabited and reproduced by various actors: cultural producers, diaspora communities, urban preservationists, religious leaders, and grassroots organisations. These actors engage the past not necessarily to affirm official narratives but sometimes to complicate, subvert, or pluralise them. In diasporic contexts—whether Armenian, Kurdish, or Balkan—writers, cooks, pilgrims, and storytellers actively sustain alternative Ottoman memories through literary works, culinary revivals, pilgrimage practices, and oral histories.

These counter-memories may not circulate in dominant institutions but shape communal identity and intergenerational transmission.

As Jeremy Walton (2016) has shown in his ethnographic work on urban memoryscapes, Ottoman legacies often survive in ambiguous materialities:

abandoned mausoleums, restored fountains, neighbourhood names, and culinary idioms that escape the logic of monumentalisation. They allow for what Rebecca Bryant (2016) terms “coexistence as labour”—the ongoing negotiation of shared and fractured memory in the shadow of conflict. In this sense, Ottoman afterlives function as zones of entangled sovereignty, where affective attachments and political claims intersect unpredictably. Media, institutions, and pedagogical practices shape memory in equally unpredictable forms.

School curricula, museum exhibitions, religious sermons, and heritage tourism contribute to scripting imperial legacies. Nevertheless, these scripts are always vulnerable to reinterpretation, rejection, or ironic subversion. In Palestine, for example, Turkish neo-Ottoman gestures—ranging from mosque renovations to political speeches—can be interpreted both as signs of solidarity and as intrusive appropriations that overwrite local history. In Armenia, any gesture toward Ottoman heritage inevitably evokes the unhealed wound of the genocide and the ongoing denial of it.

These tensions indicate the difficulty of sustaining imperial memory as a source of consensual legitimacy. While neo-Ottoman discourse thrives on the ambiguity of its symbols and the elasticity of its references, the realities of post-imperial politics often puncture this imaginary. Historical grievances, ethno-sectarian exclusions, and unresolved acts of violence render the invocation of the Ottoman past a risky endeavour. The past becomes a contested terrain not only because it is distant but unresolved—its echoes still shape claims to land, identity, justice, and belonging.

In this light, memory becomes a mode of doing politics. Engaging with the past is not merely narrating it but provincialising its authority—to disrupt its universalising claims and to reveal the uneven temporalities it continues to animate (Chakrabarty 2000). In the context of Ottoman afterlives, this means questioning the European modernist teleology that sees the empire as anachronistic and the Turkish state’s attempt to naturalise itself as its exclusive heir. Both moves rely on a linear vision of history that occludes the messy, plural, and often painful realities of imperial transition.

Provincialising the Ottoman Empire entails recognising its afterlives as incomplete and contested. It means attending to the voices, memories, and silences that exceed the frame of state-sponsored remembrance. It also demands an analytic orientation that sees empire not as a closed chapter but as a recursive condition that resurfaces in urban space, diplomatic language, legal frameworks, and cultural imaginaries. These returns are not nostalgic but strategic;

they serve as resources for articulating new forms of belonging and exclusion in a world still shaped by imperial debris.

The contributions gathered in this volume do not seek to reconstruct the empire or adjudicate its moral standing. Instead, they examine how the past is made present—how Ottoman legacies are invoked, contested, or reimagined in contemporary practices across different sites and scales. The essays map a complex cartography of remembrance, from religious diplomacy and urban memoryscapes to political rhetoric and diasporic cultural production. What binds them is not a shared assessment of Ottoman rule but a commitment to exploring how imperial history continues to haunt the present—not as a fixed origin but as a repertoire of claims, symbols, and disputes.

It means who remembers, in what language, through which institutions, and to what ends. It means reading silence as an archive, nostalgia as strategy, and heritage as projection. At a moment when global politics increasingly rely on appeals to tradition, identity, and moral authority, actors do not find simple lessons in the Ottoman past. However, the Ottoman past offers a mirror that reflects the tensions, exclusions, and possibilities of living with the empire's remains.

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Notes

1 - *Diriliş: Ertuğrul* is a Turkish historical drama set in the 13th century, depicting the life of Ertuğrul, father of Osman I, the founder of the Ottoman Empire. The series was produced in Istanbul and aired from December 2014 to May 2019.

2 - *Payitaht: Abdülhamid* is a Turkish historical drama series aired on TRT 1, Turkey's national public broadcaster, from 24 February 2017 to 4 June 2021. The series portrays Sultan Abdülhamid II's final years and was filmed primarily in Istanbul and at Seka Film Studio in İzmit, Kocaeli.

3 - Erdoğan R.T., Hagia Sophia Manifesto, in "Hagia Sophia-i Kebir Mosque-i Sharif", 12 July 2020, https://ayasofyaikebircamii.gov.tr/en/hagia-sophia-manifesto/?utm_source=chatgpt.com (last accessed 29 April 2025).

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