

MSG Moderne Stadtgeschichte, Bd. 49/1 (2018), 26-38

DOI: 10.60684/msg.v49i1.2018103

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MSG Moderne Stadtgeschichte

ISSN: 2941-6159 online

<https://moderne-stadtgeschichte.de>

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Feminist Perspectives on Ottoman Urban History

This article provides an overview of the literature that approaches Ottoman urban history with a gender perspective. It juxtaposes the valuable insights and contributions of feminist geographers with the available literature on Ottoman urban history in order to argue that the combination of the two has a great potential to enrich the field. In an attempt to reveal, recover and reconsider the roles, positions and actions of women in the midst of altered or redefined economic, social, political and cultural context of Ottoman cities, new scholarship highlights how women could re-imagine and re-conceive the city, actually neither designed for nor controlled by them, and how in time they could create female-controlled public and semi-public spaces. The negotiations, alliances and agency of women in asserting themselves in the public domain need to be reconsidered, given numerous spatial obstacles and resistance to see them as legitimate actors.

The feminist critique of urban theory and planning stressed in the late 1970s that urban planning is gendered and that urban environments are predominantly male environments.¹ Yasmina Beebeejaun argues that “gender remains a neglected focus for theory and practice in shaping cities.”² Men and women have considerably varied experiences of the city in relation to housing, use of transport, relative mobility, and spheres of employment. Now a customary trope among urban theorists, the *flâneur*³, someone who finds delight and pleasure in walking contentedly and unhurriedly through the city, is necessarily a male figure.⁴ As Wilson succinctly puts it, “Men – white middle-class men at least, and in particular – own the street without thinking about it. Women must always make a conscious claim; must each time assert anew their right to

¹ Dolores Hayden, *What Would a Non-Sexist City Be Like? Speculations on Housing, Urban Design, and Human Work*, in: *Signs* 5:3, 1980, pp. 170-187.

² Yasmina Beebeejaun, *Gender, Urban Space, and the Right to Everyday Life*, in: *Journal of Urban Affairs* 39, 2016, pp. 323-334. Recently Fouad Khan also underlined that the gender of most cities is male (January 11, 2018), see: <http://nautil.us/issue/56/perspective/your-city-has-a-gender-and-its-male> (accessed May 31, 2018).

³ The *flâneur* first appears in Charles Baudelaire's Paris poems of the 1850s, resurfacing in the work of Walter Benjamin in the early twentieth century. Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, New York 1989, pp. 185-187, 205, 304-305.

⁴ Rob Shields, “Fancy Footwork: Walter Benjamin's Notes on *flânerie*”, in *The Flâneur*, Keith Tester (ed.), London 1994, p. 67.

be 'streetwalkers'.'"⁵ Rebecca Solnit eloquently reflects on the male character of the streets that men walk by.

Almost every city is full of men's names, names that are markers of who wielded power, who made history, who held fortunes, who was remembered; women are anonymous people who changed fathers' names for husbands' as they married, who lived in private and were comparatively forgotten, with few exceptions.⁶

Urban and gender studies, as co-constitutive subjects, have only recently been coupled together. In fact, parallel to patriarchal gendered participation and representation in the public sphere, urban history, as many other subfields of history, had traditionally tended to focus more on *his* story rather than on *hers*. This was largely due to the spatial separation of home and work, which necessarily meant a highly gendered division of labor between masculine paid work and feminine unpaid work.⁷ Men were associated with public, productive spheres, including paid work outside the home, while women were associated with private, reproductive spheres that confined them within the home. However, growing and expanding scholarship on the history of women of the last few decades demonstrated the necessity of incorporating women's roles into the larger picture.

Especially due to the waves of structuralism and post-structuralism, there is more emphasis on both women's agency in history and the contextual fluidity and ongoing production of meaning (of gender and forms of power relations).⁸ It was largely thanks to postcolonial theory and method – which originally sought to recover excluded and marginalized subjects (space, culture, women, ethnic minorities) – that traditional urban studies approached and developed within itself a markedly feminist scholarship. Therefore, historical record has proved that despite the prevalence of dominant (patriarchal, traditional) gender relations encouraging women to “stay home”, women have resisted confinement to the private sphere. Women's participation especially in voluntary organizations reshaped the city and its social relations, often by creating

⁵ Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City. Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women*, Berkeley 2001, p. 139.

⁶ Rebecca Solnit, *The Power of Names*, in: Rebecca Solnit/Joshua Jelly-Schapiro (eds.), *Non-stop Metropolis. A New York City Atlas*, Berkeley 2016, p. 86.

⁷ Suzanne Mackenzie, *Restructuring the Relations of Work and Life. Women as Environmental Actors, Feminism as Geographic Analysis*, in: *Gender, Place and Culture* 6:4, 1999, pp. 417-430.

⁸ Chris Beasley, *What is Feminism? An Introduction to Feminist Theory*, London 1999, p. 91.

liminal spaces in the community where women had more power and authority than at home or work.⁹

In that respect, a systematic treatment of combined urban and gender studies offers a feminist critique of mainstream urban policy and planning and a gendered reorientation of key urban social, environmental and city-regional debates.¹⁰ These studies that take into account previously neglected dimensions of gendered critical urban analysis shed light on transformations of gender roles, state and personal politics; across intersecting spheres of home, work, the family, urban settlements and civil society. They acknowledge women as manipulating, if not shaping, urban space. Numerous researches attest that women did more than react to alterations in urban space. They actively participated in changing the *map* of the city and in redefining its essence.

In this article, I hope to provide an overview of the literature that approaches Ottoman urban history with a gender perspective. I also juxtapose the valuable insights and contributions of feminist geographers with the available literature on Ottoman urban history in order to argue that the combination of the two has a great potential to enrich the field.

Ottoman Urban Studies

For a considerable time now there is a growing body of literature in the form of city monographs. The cities around the Mediterranean, and especially port cities with multiple connections to the global system, were among the first to capture the attention of Ottoman historians – as they still continue to do so today.¹¹ Moreover, there has been traditionally more numerous and much deeper analysis of the provincial capitals and other important cities in the Balkan and Arab provinces – especially Salonika, Beirut, Aleppo and Damascus.¹² One

⁹ Beth Moore-Milroy/Susan Wisner, *Communities, Work and Public/Private Sphere Models*, in: *Gender, Place and Culture* 1:1, 1994, pp. 71-90.

¹⁰ Helen Jarvis/Paula Kantor/Jonathan Cloke (eds.), *Cities and Gender*, London/New York 2009.

¹¹ Among the first historians to deal with this topic are Edhem Eldem/Daniel Goffman/Bruce Alan Masters (eds.), *The Ottoman City between East and West: Aleppo, Izmir, and Istanbul*, New York 1999; Çağlar Keyder/Y. Eyüp Özveren/Donald Quataert (eds.), *Port-Cities of the Eastern Mediterranean, 1800-1914*, Binghamton 1993; Rhoads Murphey, *Communal Living in Ottoman Istanbul. Searching for the Foundations of an Urban Tradition*, in: *Journal of Urban History* 16:2, 1990, pp. 115-131; Heghnar Zeitlian Watenpaugh, *The Image of an Ottoman City. Imperial Architecture and Urban Experience in Aleppo in the 16th and 17th Centuries*, Leiden 2004; Biray Kolluoğlu/Meltem Toksöz (eds.), *Cities of the Mediterranean. From the Ottomans to the Present Day*, London 2010.

¹² Some examples might be, Meropi Anastassiadou, *Salonique, 1830-1912: une ville ottomane à l'âge des Réformes*, Leiden 1997; Abraham Marcus, *The Middle East on the Eve*

would actually be surprised to see that much less has been written even on the capital Istanbul leaving aside other core cities such as Bursa or Edirne.¹³

Recognizing more and more the multiple faces and realities of the Ottoman presence throughout its large geography, urban historians recently built up working groups and conglomerates in order to produce comparative studies, providing more nuanced accounts of the cities involved and the urban administration of the empire. One such significant working group has been established within the framework of the EUME (Europe in the Middle-East / the Middle-East in Europe) program at Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (Institute of Advanced Study) in 2004 in collaboration with the Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient. First formulated as 'New Approaches to the History of Merchant Cities in the Ottoman Empire and Its Successor States', later this group was named as 'Cities Compared: Urban Change in the Mediterranean and Adjacent Regions'. Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient also has become the host of the now well-known Urban Studies Seminar, organized by Nora Lafi since 2006. The intent of the Seminar has been to provide a floor to discuss several dimensions of Ottoman urban history – urban governance, cosmopolitanism, everyday life, violence, refugees, gender. Numerous projects were completed under this rubric and most of them deserve to be considered as milestones in the growth of Ottoman urban studies.¹⁴ The publications of the group, *The City in the Ottoman Em-*

of Modernity. Aleppo in the Eighteenth Century, New York 1989; Margaret L. Meriwether, *The Kin Who Count. Family and Society in Ottoman Aleppo, 1770-1840*, Austin 1999; Leila Tarazi Fawaz, *Merchants and Migrants in Nineteenth-Century Beirut*, Cambridge, Mass. 1983; Richard van Leeuwen, *Waqfs and Urban Structures. The Case of Ottoman Damascus*, Leiden 1999; Jens Hanssen/Thomas Philipp/Stefan Weber (eds.), *The Empire in the City. Arab Provincial Capitals in the Late Ottoman Empire*, Beirut 2002; Mark Mazower, *Salonica, City of Ghosts. Christians, Muslims, and Jews, 1430-1950*, New York 2005; Jens Hanssen, *Fin de siècle Beirut. The Making of an Ottoman Provincial Capital*, Oxford/New York 2005; Stefan Weber, *Damascus. Ottoman Modernity and Urban Transformation 1808-1918*, Aarhus 2009.

¹³ It requires an analysis of its own, but one main reason behind this discrepancy is the better preservation of court records and other local archives in these areas, thanks to ironically clerical or colonial interest for history. Having said that, some major works on Ottoman Anatolia should definitely be underlined: Suraiya Faroqhi, *Towns and Townsmen of Ottoman Anatolia. Trade, Crafts, and Food Production in an Urban Setting, 1520-1650*, Cambridge 1984; Leslie Peirce, *Morality Tales. Law and Gender in the Ottoman Court of Aintab*, Berkeley 2003; Hülya Canbakal, *Society and Politics in an Ottoman Town. 'Ayntāb in the 17th Century*, Leiden 2007.

¹⁴ A few examples: Nora Lafi (ed.), *Municipalités méditerranéennes. Les réformes urbaines ottomanes au miroir d'une histoire comparée*, Berlin 2005; Malte Fuhrmann, *Der Traum vom deutschen Orient. Zwei deutsche Kolonien im Osmanischen Reich 1851-1918*, Frankfurt 2006; Marc David Baer, *The Dönme. Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks*, Stanford 2010; Florian Riedler, *Public People. Seasonal Work Migrants in*

pire,¹⁵ *Urban Governance under the Ottomans: Between Cosmopolitanism and Conflict*,¹⁶ *Urban Violence in the Middle East*,¹⁷ *Understanding the City through its Margins*,¹⁸ also need to be mentioned as significant contributions to the field, especially of their comparative perspective. As previously underlined, Ottoman urban history has often been written in a fragmented manner by the prevalence of area studies. It is, therefore, very enlightening to have a comparative approach.

Despite the developmental trend in both urban and gender studies, their combined approach to Ottoman history still remains scantier. On the one hand, new scholarly works that embrace a broader understanding of Ottoman women's participation in different facets of social life are usually economic and social histories of a particular urban area, yet failing to provide a truly urban historical perspective. On the other hand, serious urban histories of the empire still suffer from the above mentioned male bias and usually remain silent about the female members of urban communities.¹⁹ Research that stood on the intersection of Ottoman urban and women's history remained scarce, except for studies concentrating on the economic functions of women.²⁰ Still, there is

Nineteenth Century Istanbul, in: Frank Eckardt/Kathrin Wildner (eds.), *Public Istanbul. Spaces and Spheres of the Urban*, Bielefeld 2008, pp. 233-253; Nazan Maksudyan, *State 'Parenthood' and Industrial Orphanages (Islâhhanes). Transformation of Urbanity and Family Life*, in: *The History of the Family* 16:2, 2011, pp. 172-181.

¹⁵ Ulrike Freitag et al. (eds.), *The City in the Ottoman Empire. Migration and the Making of Urban Modernity*, London 2011. There are two other volumes written from a comparative perspective. The first mainly concentrates on 'the Arab Middle East' and the second on the contemporary phenomena. Peter Sluglett (ed.), *The Urban Social History of the Middle East, 1750-1950*, Syracuse 2008; Martina Rieker/Kamran Asdar Ali (eds.), *Gendering Urban Space in the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa*, New York 2008.

¹⁶ Ulrike Freitag/Nora Lafi (eds.), *Urban Governance under the Ottomans. Between Cosmopolitanism and Conflict*, London 2014.

¹⁷ Ulrike Freitag et al. (eds.), *Urban Violence in the Middle East. Changing Cityscapes in the Transition from Empire to Nation State*, New York 2015.

¹⁸ Ulrike Freitag/Nora Lafi/André Chappatte (eds.), *Understanding the City through its Margins. Pluridisciplinary Perspectives from Case Studies in Africa, Asia and the Middle East*, London 2018.

¹⁹ For instance, in Charles L. Wilkins', *Forging Urban Solidarities: Ottoman Aleppo 1640-1700*, Leiden, 2009, the word "gender" is used only once and in a footnote!

²⁰ Haim Gerber, *Social and Economic Position of Women in an Ottoman City, Bursa, 1600-1700*, in: *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 12:3, 1980, pp. 231-244; Suraiya Faroqhi, *Subjects of the Sultan. Culture and Daily Life in the Ottoman Empire*, London 2005; James A. Reilly, *Women in the Economic Life of Late-Ottoman Damascus*, in: *Arabica* 42:1, 1995, pp. 79-106; Ronald C. Jennings, *Women in Early 17th Century Ottoman Judicial Records. The Sharia Court of Anatolian Kayseri*, in: *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 18:1, 1975, pp. 53-114; Fariba Zarinebaf-Shahr, *The Role of Wo-*

reason to believe that this gap will soon become narrower as new contributions to the field include gender in their analysis.²¹

Women and Social Change in Urban Settings

Elizabeth Wilson characterizes the urban as a space of opportunity and abandon for women. Notwithstanding its difficulties, Wilson argues, the city emancipates women far more than rural life or suburban domesticity.²² It goes without saying that the urban space is highly segregated by income, class and race, yet it is rarely demarcated according to explicit sex separation. However, normalization of a patriarchal gender regime and hegemonic masculinity have profound impacts on urban experience, life-chances and well-being. The resulting inequalities are wide ranging – from legal barriers to owning property, to real or perceived threats of violence or insidious labeling.²³ Having said these, it is still crucial to underline that Ottoman women successfully make use of the urban space for mobility, transgression and social change. Hence, they *negotiate* with urban milieu with their own strategies and flourish in the interstices of the city.²⁴

The criticism of Alan Mikhael to Ottoman urban historians in their insistence to refer to a Habermasian split between ‘public’ and ‘private’ and to assume that ‘public’ is male, is worth considering. In his article on the Ottoman coffee houses, he claims that *kahvehanes* were important because they complicated and confused traditional notions of space and gender. Borrowing Michel Foucault’s *heterotopia*, a space “capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible,” Mikhael challen-

men in the Urban Economy of Istanbul, 1700–1850, in: *International Labor and Working-Class History* 60, 2001, pp. 141–152.

²¹ Some important works, so far mostly in the form of articles need to be mentioned here. Amila Buturovic/Irvin Cemil Schick (eds.), *Women in the Ottoman Balkans. Gender, Culture and History*, London 2007; Haris Exertzoglou, *The Cultural Uses of Consumption. Negotiating Class, Gender, and Nation in the Ottoman Urban Centers during the 19th Century*, in: *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35:1, 2003, pp. 77–101; Eyal Ginio, *Living on the Margins of Charity*, in: Mine Ener/Amy Singer/Michael Bonner (eds.), *Poverty and Charity in the Middle Eastern Contexts*, New York 2003, pp. 165–184; Eyal Ginio, 18. Yüzyıl Selanikinde Yoksul Kadınlar, in: *Toplum ve Bilim* 89, 2001, pp. 190–204; Palmira Johnson Brummett, *Gender and Empire in Late Ottoman Istanbul. Caricature, Models of Empire, and the Case for Ottoman Exceptionalism*, in: *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27:2, 2007, pp. 283–302.

²² Wilson, *The Sphinx*, p. 10.

²³ Jarvis/Kantor/Cloke, *Cities and Gender*.

²⁴ Wilson, *The Sphinx*, p. 8.

ges the dichotomous representations (male-female, public-private) of Ottoman urban spaces with a queer understanding.²⁵

The research focusing on the manifestations of the gender regime in the urban public realm has been quite fruitful. Literature has highlighted women's historical contributions to urban norms and other such reconfigurations, despite all the dominant ideologies about women's place and women's space.²⁶ In the Ottoman case, research on consumption and gender have discussed novel forms of public presence of women. Exertzoglou and Frierson have underlined the impact of consumption pattern on public identities, especially that of women.²⁷ Public appearance of fashionably dressed women not only triggered mansplaining regarding morality, resources, and patriotism, but also enlarged the involvement of women with the urban space and challenged gendered norms of appearance. The negotiation of urban spaces through dress was a significant challenge for women of all classes. They would either "fit in" or face exclusion. Danielle J. van Dobben's dissertation on the changes in dance practices in the late Ottoman Empire underlines that dancing framed moral issues about gender, sexuality, and public space, reflecting and reshaping social life at the same time.²⁸ While women took part in the remaking of the city, they also reconstituted gender relations and gender identities.²⁹

Women's negotiation capability was not only limited to the spatial axes, but also reached out to the temporal one. Gila Hadar noted that women were the timekeepers within the patriarchal family and society of Salonika. The life of the family, namely women and children, was conducted not in accordance with official space and time—either "government time" or "Jewish time"— but in

²⁵ Alan Mikhail, *The Heart's Desire. Gender, Urban Space and the Ottoman Coffee House*, in: Dana Sajdi (ed.), *Ottoman Tulips, Ottoman Coffee. Leisure and Lifestyle in the Eighteenth Century*, London 2007, pp. 133-170.

²⁶ Dolores Hayden, *Redesigning the American Dream, Gender, Housing, and Family Life*, New York 2002; David Sibley, *Gender, Science, Politics and Geographies of the City*, in: *Gender, Place and Culture* 2:1, 1995, pp. 37-49.

²⁷ Exertzoglou, *The Cultural Uses of Consumption*; Elisabeth Frierson, *Gender, Consumption and Patriotism. The Emergence of An Ottoman Public Sphere*, in: Armando Salvatore/Dale F. Eickelman (eds.), *Public Islam and the Common Good*, Leiden 2004; Palmira Brummett, *Dogs, Women, Cholera, and Other Menaces in the Streets. Cartoon Satire in the Ottoman Revolutionary Press, 1908-11*, in: *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 27:4, 1995, pp. 433-460.

²⁸ Danielle J. Van Dobben, *Dancing Modernity. Gender, Sexuality and the State in the Late Ottoman Empire and Early Turkish Republic*, Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Arizona, 2008.

²⁹ Valerie Preston/Ebru Üstündağ, *Feminist Geographies of the 'City'. Multiple Voices, Multiple Meanings*, in: Lise Nelson/Joni Seager (eds.), *A Companion to Feminist Geography*, Malden 2005, pp. 211-227.

terms of more internal, restricted dimensions.³⁰ On Barak highlights the active participation of middle-class women in new timekeeping arrangements in colonial Egypt.³¹ In his analysis, Egyptian women appear not only as the rhetorical “other” of modern abstract masculine clock-time. Alongside this important capacity, women paradoxically reinforced masculine temporality in several important, if concealed ways. Notably, they were the ones who made it possible for their husbands and sons to lead a scheduled life while at the same time taking much of the blame for disruptions in these new modern routines. Undoubtedly, synchronization and the transmission of time between and inside each of the interconnected “private” and “public” spheres involved much social tension. Still, it is still relevant to talk about the agency of women over the passage of time inside the house, which eventually influenced outside-the-house temporality.

Different women, based on their own history of spatial and social knowledge, approach the city in varied ways. Post-modern (post-structural) feminist writing on the city brought about the recognition that gender identity functions through multiplicity and differences between (categories of) women.³² Diverse groups of women, possessing multiple and fluid identities (and identifications) approached the city from different angles, with distinct intents and with unequal pace. Heterogeneous everyday experiences and domestic spaces of women determined their relation to and presence in public arenas. What feminist geographers call *intersectionality* underlines that gender identity operates in complex relationships to other social identities such as race, ethnicity, class, nationality, religion, sexuality, age, health and First World-/Third World-affliction.³³

Research on philanthropy and political agency of women in the nineteenth century Ottoman society depicts the large role that intersectionality plays in how women associate themselves to the city.³⁴ Philanthropy was a fairly diffe-

³⁰ Gila Hadar, Jewish Tobacco Workers in Salonika. Gender and Family in the Context of Social and Ethnic Strife, in: Amila Buturovic/Irvin Cemil Schick (eds.), *Women in the Ottoman Balkans. Gender, Culture and History*, London 2007, pp. 127-152.

³¹ On Barak, *Times of Tamaddun. Gender, Urbanity and Temporality in Modern Egypt*, in: Nazan Maksudyan (ed.), *Women and the City, Women in the City. A Gendered Perspective for Ottoman Urban History*, New York 2014, pp. 15-35.

³² Linda McDowell, *Gender, Identity, and Place. Understanding Feminist Geographies*, Minneapolis 1999, p. 22.

³³ Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography. The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*, Minneapolis 1993; Patricia Martin, *Contextualizing Feminist Political Theory*, in: Lynn A. Staeheli/Leonore Kofman/Linda J. Peake (eds.), *Mapping Women, Making Politics. Feminist Perspectives on Political Geography*, London 2004, pp. 15-30.

³⁴ Nazan Maksudyan, ‘This time women as well got involved in politics’. *Nineteenth Cen-*

rent form of female engagement, granting women an exceptional freedom of mobility in the city and at unconventional times. They could easily bypass spatial urban boundaries, which were mostly drawn with reference to class, gender, and respectability. Philanthropic women's organizations breached various social hierarchies on a daily basis, as non-Muslims in Muslim households or as wealthy women in poor neighborhoods. Their direct involvement in current political, social and religious issues was a significant source of empowerment. They assumed a significant amount of authority in the societal level and especially within larger female networks. In that respect, the analysis of women's organization and philanthropy as a new urban profession for women brings into light how women from different class, religious, ethnic or immigrant backgrounds had manifold linkages within themselves and with the urban space. Fluidity is not only meaningful on the identity level, but current research recognizes that the urban context is also a changing set of situated social relationships that are influenced by economic, social, political and cultural changes operating at various spatial scales and interacting with each other. Change in urban places in return alters women's lives and the gender inequalities associated with them. The fluidity of urban environment may also create opportunities for women to make progressive changes through individual and collective action. The city represents a site of personal autonomy and political possibilities for women. Cities were significant places where women were able to negotiate social change. At least, in the urban environment this potential for empowerment becomes particularly visible and thus accessible to the historian through a range of material sources.

Men's and women's spheres of action were being redefined in a period in which the traditional composition of family was also changing, particularly in urban areas and in middle-class environments. The boundaries of wealthy women's public activity had expanded since the 1860s, thanks to their involvement in organizations for the support of women's education, in spite of the predominantly male character of public space.³⁵ Elizabeth B. Frierson rightly criticizes the concentration of research on 1908 and 1914 – 1923 as pivotal years when women began to be more active in public life and politics in the Ottoman Empire. She, instead, argues that change in women's social status already started in the 1890s, "in the middle of wars and refugee flows into the empire."³⁶

tury Ottoman Women's Organizations and Political Agency, in: Id. (ed.), *Women and the City, Women in the City. A Gendered Perspective on Ottoman Urban History*, New York 2014, pp. 107-135.

³⁵ Exertoglou, *Cultural Uses of Consumption*.

³⁶ Elizabeth B. Frierson, *Women in Late Ottoman Intellectual Society*, in: Elisabeth Özdalga

Women's involvement in philanthropy, education and politics is a relevant perspective to map out gender relations and gender identities in urban places. Ottoman women tried to find common ground for their experiences as urban-ites of important cities, as members of non-Muslim communities, as educated and elite minority of women in their polities. Their interaction is very similar to what has been previously observed by Sarah Deutsch. Women from diverse backgrounds came together for common purposes and both through rivalries and alliances, they formed new urban relations and spaces which in the end challenged and negotiated the over-imbued sexual division of urban space.³⁷ Their philanthropic engagement with urban social life created chances for them to have a say in changing the urban structure and to take agency.³⁸ In this picture, the city becomes the site of modern citizen-making. Women tried their chances of becoming full citizens by forcing free access to the streets, by demonstrating in front of public buildings, by establishing shelters for women and needy. Different groups of Ottoman women living in distinct temporalities and spatialities have negotiated ethnic, religious, nationalist and sexual urban tensions and so they were all engaged in the political questions of their time as significant actors of social change.

Urban Sexual Geography and Formations of Belonging

The city is more than its economic and ethnic geography. Urban sexual geography crosscut them in both ideological and physical terms. Wolff suggests that there cannot be a female flâneuse, only the prostitute. In the context of the Ottoman Empire, one needs to add the lower classes, underscoring the idea that the freedom to roam is very much a male freedom.³⁹ Recent scholarship demonstrated that seclusion was a privilege of upper class women who had the means to stay away from the streets and send instead their slaves and servants for running the chores outside the house and in public spaces.⁴⁰ Women from the lower classes had to walk the streets for a variety of economic and social activities such as to buy, sell, transact petty commodities or to go the bath

(ed.), *Late Ottoman Society. The Intellectual Legacy*, London 2005, pp. 135-161, here p. 136.

³⁷ Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940*, New York 2000.

³⁸ So in principle, it would be very interesting to examine rural women as actors in social change, but this inquiry would definitely require different and also rare kinds of source material.

³⁹ Janet Wolff, *The Invisible Flâneuse. Women and the Literature of Modernity*, in: *Theory, Culture and Society* 2:3, 1985, pp. 37-47.

⁴⁰ Leslie Peirce, *Morality Tales*, pp. 353-4.

houses, market places and sacred places. In the case of domestic servants or *beslemes* in the streets, they could easily become targets of sexual assaults.⁴¹ Migration waves and economic and social crises in the nineteenth century increased the visibility of women in the public spaces. The number of women who did not have families, all alone or sometimes with their small children and totally out of any protection significantly increased in the Ottoman capital.⁴²

Since power relationships intertwine with the field of vision, the cultural codes and politics of seeing and being seen is deeply gendered. In urban space women are more likely than men to be the ones who are looked at, the objects of the gaze.⁴³ Therefore, women alone in public space have been inevitably women “out of place,” subject to sanctions and negative connotations. As proof for internalization of the sexual geography and gendered spatiality, it has been demonstrated that “warnings about the potential for sexual victimization are a central feature of women’s socialization”.⁴⁴ Moreover, the presence of elite women in working-class neighborhoods would be a breach of proper sexual geography, since only working women and sex-workers were allowed there.⁴⁵ Late Ottoman controversies over the opening of maternity clinics (largely for single mothers and prostitutes) is a typical example of such blurring of boundaries, where elite women disturbingly occupied the same space with ‘other women’.⁴⁶ In the case of the midwives, on the other hand, there was no strict spatial or temporal boundaries. They were allowed to be anywhere in the city, even in unusual hours without being seen as immoral or “out of place”.⁴⁷

The city offered more numerous and probable promises for the emancipation of women in comparison to rural life. However, the city also demanded a sense of “urban belonging”. Rural and migrant women were expected, if not forced to ‘fit in’ the urban norms as part of their belonging. The experiences of domestic servants in urban environments, many of whom were of rural origins, are important indicators of the dichotomy between urban-rural identities or belongings and criticism against and exclusion of rural practices and beha-

⁴¹ Nazan Maksudyan, Foster-Daughter or Servant, Charity or Abuse. *Beslemes in the Late Ottoman Empire*, in: *Journal of Historical Sociology* 21:4, 2008, pp. 488-512.

⁴² Gülhan Balsoy, *Bir Kadın Hastanesi Olarak Haseki Hastanesi ve 19. Yüzyıl İstanbul’unda Bikes ve Bimesken bir Kadın Olmak*, in: *Toplumsal Tarih* 257, 2015, pp. 80-84.

⁴³ Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*, Cambridge 1994.

⁴⁴ Ross Macmillan/Annette Nierobisz/Sandy Welsh, *Experiencing the Streets. Harassment and Perceptions of Safety among Women*, in: *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 37:3, 2000, pp. 306-322.

⁴⁵ Phil Hubbard, *Women Outdoors. Destabilizing the Public/Private Dichotomy*, in: Nelson/Seager, *A Companion*, pp. 322-333.

⁴⁶ Maksudyan, *This time*.

⁴⁷ Gülhan Balsoy, *The Politics of Reproduction in Ottoman Society, 1838-1900*, London 2013.

viour in the urban space.⁴⁸ Belonging does not simply denote being a member or a resident of a place. It also has affective dimensions; as a sentiment, it builds up and grows out of everyday life activities.⁴⁹ For De Certeau corporal everyday activities in the city are part of a process of appropriation and territorialization.⁵⁰ Once those activities are lacking or changing in an unprecedented pace, then people might develop a sentiment of dis-belonging.

In discussing the gap between sexual freedoms afforded to men and women on the streets, one needs to be careful not to reproduce the idea that the public realm is a solely male realm, nor the private realm exclusively female. Instead, as it has been demonstrated by feminist geographers, it is to assert that men and women make their presences in the urban space on a profoundly gendered basis.⁵¹ Ulrike Freitag's research on the Carnival of al-Qays in Jeddah is a perfect representation of how women both reproduced and played with the urban sexual geography.⁵² When men have left Jeddah for Mecca and onwards to mount Arafat, the women would dress up as men and for four consecutive nights, they would take to the streets with drums and perform dances. So, during this carnival, women not only take over the streets, but also, they do it at night time, overturning both spatial and temporal axis of urban belonging. As to stress and sanction now the reversed 'out of place' roles in the public sphere, they could even take an aggressive posture by attempting to beat up those men who did not leave them celebrate unhindered. The urban environment is the context within which gender identities and gender relations are negotiated and this context is in turn altered by changing gender identities and relations.

Hegemonic masculinity of city streets might make women unwelcome outsiders, even targets of sexual assaults. Spatial relations, including restricted access to public space and limited mobility because of fear of violence, can be seen as a test for equality – a parameter of empowerment.⁵³ Women negotiate space for themselves by conscious practices of boldness and through their very presence in the public sphere. The women who feel confident reclaim space for themselves and make it more available for other women through everyday

⁴⁸ Maksudyan, Foster-Daughter or Servant.

⁴⁹ Nira Yuval Davis, *Belongings*. In *Between the Indigene and the Diasporic*, in: Umut Özkırımlı (ed.), *Nationalism in the 21st Century*, Basingstoke 2003, pp. 127–144.

⁵⁰ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley 1984.

⁵¹ Kim Namaste, *Genderbashing. Perceived Transgressions of Normative Sex-Gender Relations in Public Spaces*, in: *Environment and Planning D – Society and Space* 14:2, 1996, pp. 221–240.

⁵² Ulrike Freitag, *Playing with Gender. The Carnival of al-Qays in Jeddah*, in: Maksudyan, *Women and the City*, pp. 71–85.

⁵³ Hille Koskela, *Bold Walk and Breakings. Women's Spatial Confidence Versus Fear of Violence*, in: *Gender, Place and Culture* 4:3, 1997, pp. 301–319.

practices and routinized uses. In that respect, they are both victimized and empowered by the same gendered urban environment.

Conclusion

There is a growing scholarly sensibility by highlighting the role of women in the making of Ottoman urban space. Embracing the significance of intersectionality in gender studies, new research deals with relevant analytical categories such as class, culture, ethnicity, nationhood and religion. In an attempt to reveal, recover and reconsider the roles, positions and actions of women in the midst of altered or redefined economic, social, political and cultural context of Ottoman cities, new scholarship highlights how women could re-imagine and re-conceive the city, actually neither designed for nor controlled by them, and how in time they could create female-controlled public and semi-public spaces. The negotiations, alliances and agency of women in asserting themselves in the public domain need to be reconsidered, given numerous spatial obstacles and resistance to see them as legitimate actors.