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**Ottoman Urban Studies Seminar
Introduction 2008-2009
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“Daily Life in Ottoman Towns : Historiographical Stakes and New Research Perspectives”

Ulrike Freitag and Nora Lafi

Dear friends of the Ottoman Urban Studies Seminar. It is a pleasure to have you all here for this third year of our reflections about Ottoman Urban Societies. After a first year about urban government, a second one about the question of cosmopolitanism, we choose to dedicate this year to the examination of the question of daily life themes. Daily life, or everyday life, indeed, has been in the last decades the object of intense historiographical investments. Some years ago, it also seemed to be the most innovative feature of what the historical academia had to offer. But then, it kind of lost part of its intellectual attraction and was supplanted by other styles of methodological explorations. What seems to us though is that in the present intellectual panorama of Ottoman, and particularly of Ottoman urban Studies, a renewed attention to the concept might allow some interpretative progress, if based on a renewed methodological basis. In two words, because it is part of the goals of this seminar to build this new basis collectively: how can we use the concept and the method in order to explore with a critical look new aspects of the urban history of ottoman towns?

The spirit of this introduction is both to present the historiographical panorama, trying to decipher the stakes behind the various trends, and to propose some questions for our future debates here in the coming weeks and months.

After 1945, Everyday Life became the object of a deep international historiographical renewal, reflection also of intense ideological confrontations and the field of strong divergent interpretations. This season of debates culminated in the 1980s, with both notables convergences between the various historiographical traditions, and important divergences. Everyday Life as a method in history does not necessarily come from the same point and go into the same direction according to these various traditions.

This is why the object of this introduction is both to look back at those debates in order to understand better those still open, or newly opened today, and to examine the impact of such debates, past and present, on Ottoman urban studies. We will start with a panorama of what the history of everyday life means in various historiographies and of the methodological, but also ideological backgrounds it implies. It is what we meant when we used the word stakes in our title: everyday life in history is in no way a neutral playground for the historian, and before we launch our collective explorations this year, it seemed adequate that we try and contribute to a deciphering of those complex stakes.

We would start with France, and of course with the new questionings which the Ecole des Annales gave to the historical profession. Everyday life was part of it, and in a significant manner arrived on the international scene through this mediation.

The main aspect, of course is linked to the methodological programme Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre and Fernand Braudel set during the 1930's. With their contributions, history became a social science and could no longer remain attached to its academic tradition and narratives. Refusal of the predominance of chronology and power was coupled with research for alternative methods in order to respond to the one stake the historian was to aim for: understanding the functioning of past societies, and not only narrate the linearity of a single

dimensional time whose base was the succession of political powers. The invention of everyday life studies is to be analyzed into this new intellectual context, with a larger look at what happened in the definition of modern sociology, between the German school, the Chicago school and post-Durkheimian studies. As for urban studies, it is clear that their invention as a field of research derives from such impulses.

And for everyday life studies, the main methodological proposal surely came from Fernand Braudel, with the invention of a specific vocabulary, the influence of which was to be durable¹. Among the new Braudelian paradigms, the most important is the one of material civilization (*civilisation matérielle*). Material civilization was an invitation to study not only the panorama of living conditions and of objects surrounding the individual of the past, but also the potential sources for the historian to find traces of it. The concept was elaborated progressively between the post-war period and the end of the 1970's and follows in its consistence the whole career of the scholar. The ambition was to reconstruct past societies, including the dimensions of the living experience of individuals, according to their social milieu. In the work of Braudel, the focus on the evolution of what he calls the material civilization is also a way to follow the evolution of the socio-economic system whose understanding was at the heart of his goals: Everyday life not only for the sake of anonymous individuals of the past, but also as an element of his global narrative of capitalism. It is important for us to have in mind this insertion of Braudelian everyday life perspectives into a broader programme. What it has brought is an attention to the consequences of civilizational changes on daily life. But it has also contributed to build a time oriented narrative, on the one hand, which is linked to the progressist chronology of the deployment of capitalism, and on the other hand to a culturally oriented narrative with the spatial consequence of creating "cultural areas". And as Braudel has a tendency to think space in terms of civilizational blocks, these attitudes have in no way been neutral for the paradigmatic conditions of study of Ottoman realities². One of the consequences (but of course Braudel can't be held for sole responsible) is the definition of Ottoman studies in a cultural perspective and with a predominance of the "periphery" paradigm. Everyday life studies owe Braudel not only their definition as a priority field for historical studies, but also their insertion into a very specific global programme. The question for us today is our positioning in relation to this heritage.

In a post-Braudelian perspective, Ottoman Daily Life Studies must also be a discussion of the force of the spatial, cultural and civilizational construction of differences. We can't take from Braudel only his invitation to pay attention to certain subjects, we have to deal also with the discussion of the consequences of the application of his global models. We can't naively follow Braudel's programme only in its practical base, we also have to confront it with the broad dimension of a discussion of the insertion of the Ottoman empire into the world system. It is on this side that there is today a lot to do, in order to contribute to the deconstruction of culturalist paradigms and of static vision of cultural areas. We would make of the aspect our first historiographical stake: what can a post-braudelian perspective bring to the understanding not only of everyday life in cities of the empire but also of the evolution of the empire itself in its relation to the rest of the world.

The second stake might be linked to the Marxist heritage.

And here again, the French historiography invites us (oblige us maybe) to find a pertinent positioning in relation to the Marxist heritage, mainly with the contribution to everyday life

¹ First published 1967. For the final version of this exploration : Braudel (Fernand), *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme, XVe-XVIIIe siècle*. Volume 1, *Les structures du quotidien : Le possible et l'impossible* ; volume 2, *Les jeux de l'échange* ; volume 3 : *Le temps du monde*. Paris, Armand Colin, 1979, p. 543, 599, 606. Braudel (Fernand), *The structures of Everyday Life: The Limits of the Possible*. Translated by Sian Reynolds. New York: Harper and Row, 1981, 623p.

² For a reflection on this subject: Stoianovich (Traian), 'Theoretical Implications of Braudel's "Civilisation Matérielle"', *The Journal of Modern history*, 1969, 41-1, pp. 68-81.

studies of Henri Lefebvre. The “Vie matérielle”, material life paradigm Lefebvre promoted is of course linked to the heritage of the *Annales*, but also to a Marxist perspective of refusing to study societies in a top-down perspective, and of proposing a method that could encompass the existence of ordinary people. But here again, the everyday life perspective is part of a broader project, and of a global narrative. Every day life studies are conceived as a way to make contact with the dimension of popular life, and their exposure as a narrative is part of a precisely built rhetorical and ideological project³. LIRE LA NOTE.

If Braudel focused on the early modern world, Lefebvre’s focus is definitely on the XIXth century. He sees industrialization and urbanization leading to the disappearance of traditional values. The result is that the individual remains alienated and the consequence is that the only exit is a collective action from below in order to impose not only a social order but also a system of values and references. This revolutionary narrative is very efficient in identifying the roots of changes in everyday life with industrialization and urbanization. But it is also very time oriented and spatially oriented: the revolution, or even change can come only from places affected by the causes. Inevitably, the Ottoman empire, in this perspective (but Lefebvre is not directly responsible), could appear as a periphery. With two exit routes, which have been tried by Ottomanists: show that there was an industrialization process, or show that peripheries were not necessarily passive receptacles.

In the German context, the study of everyday life, of microhistory and of topics with anthropological leanings comes from a different background. They mark a departure from a Marxist-inspired structuralist social and economic history, aiming at a more nuanced, culturally aware presentation of the life of ordinary men and women and thus replacing the grand narratives with those which show more sensitivity to the complex interplay of different factors in history, and to the individual rather than “society” as a whole.

For us, the stake is precisely to take part in contemporary debates. A rediscovery of Lefebvre is clearly going on in neo-marxist intellectual circles⁴, including Ottoman Studies. The question is: how can the study of everyday life contribute to these debates? With two main questionings: how can we take profit from the method and suggestions and at the same time beware off the paradoxically culturalist background that comes with them? Do we really have to think in terms of industrialization in order to understand modernity? Isn’t there a way to access a dimension of cultural complexity, for example in defying from these founding narratives in everyday life studies? Or else: what would be our narrative in this field? What could the objects and the dimension of materiality of life teach? (that changes in the structures of daily life followed more complex routes than the ones suggested by the rate of industrialization? That the relationship with the “traditional” material life can’t be reduced to the dialectics of an external modernity? These are some of the stakes of our reflections. In other words, a disenchantment of previously existing narratives of modernity. The debate: do we just want to suggest nuances to global systems? Or do these impulses form the basis of our own interpretative system? Is there a turn in cultural studies, in which Ottoman Urban Studies could bring a decisive impulse, in order to propose new paradigms? Or is the stake of our time just to discuss the closed systems we inherited of?

³ Lefebvre (Henri), *La vie quotidienne dans le monde moderne*, Paris, Gallimard, 1968, 383p.

Lefebvre (Henri), *Introduction à la modernité. Préludes*, Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1962, 376p.

Lefebvre (Henri), *Critique de la vie quotidienne. Tome II : Fondements d’une sociologie de la quotidienneté*, Paris, l’Arche, 1961, 361p.

Pasin (Angel Enrique Carretero), *La quotidienneté comme objet : Henri Lefebvre et Michel Maffesoli. Deux lectures opposées*, *Sociétés*, 2002-4, 16p.

See also *Von der Stadt zur urbanen Gesellschaft* : Jacob Burckhardt und

Henri Lefebvre / Kurt Meyer

⁴ Henri Lefebvre : a critical introduction / Andy Merrifield

Derek Schilling (in the paper we sent you as a preliminary reading), tries to deconstruct this French construction of Everyday life studies as a ready to use paradigm, in replacing the phases of its construction into their respective contexts⁵. This leads him to discuss what we could call the hidden agendas of Braudel and Lefebvre, to suggest an attention to Foucault's micro-technologies of power, and to evoke the way in which anthropologists like Michel Maffesoli and Michel De Certeau contributed in dismantling the purpose oriented mechanics of everyday life studies. Angel Enrique Carretero Pasin follows a similar track⁶. These both visions should be used as invitations to while disenchanting the Everyday life panorama, to find the methodological pertinence of present research programmes.

In order to discuss capitalism and Marxism in a so-called periphery, two ways have been followed: the desperate search for traces of industry and working class in the Empire, in order to be able to insert the periphery into the system, or the affirmation that there is a life outside of the system. Present theoretical explorations suggest that we should go further: use these perspectives to refine global visions, and most of all to confront the cultural question. Our wish in this seminar is that, while examining many case studies, we little by little confront to this questioning: from below, daily life, not as simple a system as ottoman studies show, and what? The answer may be into a reflection on the journeys of a modernity whose definition must be rooted into the knowledge of a finally no more naïve tradition.

So here is what in our opinion the French approach to everyday life studies suggests.

But our reflection is also based on German impulses (and we don't underestimate the German influence from Marx in French Marxism and of Georg Simmel in French Historical Sociology or in the Chicago School!)

But, for the purpose of this introduction, we will focus on the methodological impulse given by Alf Lüdtke and others in the context of the post-war evolution of the historical profession. In Germany too, indeed, the history of everyday life has been the object of important methodological and practical contributions⁷. And Marxist historians have suggested other ways of investigating popular life. The German new history of daily life was also the creation of a generation of post-war historians, coming into high visibility in the 1980's, which had the insertion of German historiography into international debates as a constant programme.

As Geoff Eley states⁸, one of the major contributions of this period is the promotion of alternative sources, to make those who didn't write speak: oral history, photographic

⁵ Schilling (Derek), *Everyday Life and the challenge to History in Postwar France. Braudel, Lefebvre, Certau*", *Diacritics*, 2003, 33-1, p.23-40.

⁶ Pasin (Angel Enrique Carretero), *La quotidienneté comme objet :Henri Lefebvre et Michel Maffesoli. Deux lectures opposées*, *Sociétés*, 2002-4, 16p.

⁷ Schulze Winfried, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945*, Munich, Oldenbourg, 1989, 366p.

Lüdtke (Alf) (Ed.), *Alltagsgeschichte Zur Rekonstruktion historischer Ergahrungen und Lebensweisen*, Francfort, Campus Verlag, 1989, 349p.

Alf Lüdtke, "Introduction: What is the History of Everyday Life and Who are Its Practitioners?" *The History of Everyday Life*, (ed.) Alf Lüdtke, 1995, pp. 3-40.

James (H.) and Jackson (J.r.) *Alltagsgeschichte, Social Science History, and the Study of Migration in Nineteenth-Century Germany*, *Central European History*, 23-2,3, 1990, pp. 242-263.

Berdahl (Robert) et al., *Klassen und Kultur, Sozialanthropologische Perspektiven in des Geschichtsschreibung*, Frankfurt, M. Syndikat, 1982, p.

Rosenhaft (Eve), "History, Anthropology, and the Study of Everyday Life, A Review Article", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 29-1, 1987, pp. 99-105.

Kaschuba (Wolfgang), *Lebenswelt un kultur der unterbürgerlichen Schichten im 19. Und 20. Jahrhundert*. München, R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1990, 153p.

Crew (David F.), *Alltagsgeschichte : A new Social History 'From below'*, *Central European History*, 22-3,4, *German Histories: Challenges in Therory*, Cambridge University Press on behalf of Conference Group for Central European History of the American Historical Association, 1989, pp. 394-407.

⁸ Geoff Eley, *Labor History Social History. "Alltagsgeschichte": Experience, Culture, and the Politics of the Everyday—a New Direction for German Social History?*, *The Journal of Modern History*, 61-2, 1989, pp. 287-343. Published by the University of Chicago Press.

documentation. The question of the sources, which was not at the centre of the focus neither of Braudel nor of Lefebvre, is indeed crucial in the new German history of everyday life. Lüdtkke's lifetime fight has been to defend the paradigmatic pertinence of his proposals, against both labour history and cultural history. In this German construction of everyday life studies as a refinement of rough Marxist analysis of the living conditions of the working class, and an alternative to the relativism of cultural studies, there is surely an illustration of how a neo-Marxist perspective can confront to the quest of traces of popular life. Remains the question of the general narrative. What is *alltagsgeschichte* saying in the end? It is precisely the object of current debates. But also: is *alltagsgeschichte* an exit route to the dead ends of culturalist narratives? And what could be the lessons of it for the Ottoman Empire? Because if an excess of finalization is an obstacle, it is also a stimulant for discussion. In the case of *alltagsgeschichte*, it is more the contrary: as German historiography in this field defies global narratives, the question is to sort out what is useful for our discussions. Because the stake is not to apply blindly the model to another field. It is to use it if it has a pertinence. What can we learn? About the Empire? About urban societies? About modernity? Part of the stakes of our present debates will be to sort this out.

Outside of these two major impulses, from France and from Germany, everyday life studies were also enriched by the perspectives brought in by the Italian *microstoria*. And what *microstoria* brings is not only a new scale of study, it is a relationship to the sources, an intimacy with the social production of historical traces. It can be of great help in our reflections on ottoman towns⁹. With the question "is small beautiful", Brad Gregory suggested such discussions of the pertinence for everyday life studies of the reflections on scale *microstoria* introduced¹⁰.

About the English historiography, let us just mention, the evolution of labour studies and their progressive inclusion of cultural paradigms¹¹. The evolution of everyday life studies in the journal *Urban History* might be taken as an indicator. ... There is also a lot going on in the field of anthropological studies, following discussions started at the end of the 1980's¹².

And, at this preliminary stage of our reflections, let us also mention a series of impulses or themes that we have to keep in mind when discussing urban ottoman realities.

New aspects of material life

Modes de vie. Bourgeois life.

Food, Interiors¹³

Cuisine

consumption

Sport (Georges Vigarello)

But also, and the impulse comes from America, on everyday life: techno-social studies: the diffusion of technical modernity in everyday life¹⁴

But let us come to Ottoman Studies. We will have plenty of time this academic year to discuss both the specificities of this field and its possible contributions to global debates, but we would like today to begin to suggest a certain number of directions for our debates.

⁹ Revel (Jacques) (ed.), *La micro-analyse à l'expérience*, Paris, Gallimard le Seuil, 1996, 243p.

¹⁰ *History and Theory*, 1999, 38-1, p.100-110.

¹¹ *Critiques of everyday life* / Michael E. Gardiner

¹² Blee (Katheleen) and Billings (Dwight), *Reconstructing Daily-Life in the past: an hermeneutical approach to ethnographic data*, *The Sociological Quarterly*, 1986, 27-4, pp. 443-462.

¹³ *Vita di casa: abitare, mangiare, vestire nell'Europa moderna* (Raffaella Sarti, Laterza, 1999, 356p.

¹⁴ Tobey (Ronald), *Technology as Freedom. The New Deal and the Electrical Modernization of the American Home*, Berkeley, U of Cal Press, 1996, 316p.

BIJKER W., 1995, *Of bicycles, bakelites and bulbs: toward a theory of sociotechnical change*, Cambridge (Ma), MIT.

Ottoman Studies, indeed, have long been acting as a passive actor in the context of international debates about everyday life studies. The ottoman horizon was generally the object of a late application of methods experimented elsewhere, with of course an effect of fashion. Ottomanists have often been followers, and the specific ottoman historiography often reflects international debates and impulses with a difference of a few years. Although the quality of the work can be very high, and although the information provided can be precious, it is not always a fertile base for theoretical discussions. But already the fact that these methods have been applied has brought a lot to the knowledge of ottoman societies. But of course we can't be happy with this fact. The aim of the historian is also to discuss the nature of societies and the nature of the evolutions they experience, not only to describe. As we have already seen, in two occasions, ottoman daily life studies have been at the heart of crucial theoretical enterprises. We could sum it up as: on the one hand the first Quataert paradigm, before he introduced, in a second phase with studies on consumption, the cultural and individual dimensions into his method, with the refinement of the Marxist reading of industrialization in the peripheries (but a somewhat artificial quest for traces of industrial culture) and on the other hand present debates about the fact that it is not because you are not at the heart of industrialization processes that you are not inserted into a certain sphere of modernity and circulation. It is the relativization of the importation paradigm. As it occurs also for African Studies (let us just quote for everyday life studies in this field the paper by Andreas Eckert and Adam Jones)¹⁵, a renewal is now developing. Our aim is to contribute to the insertion of these new trends into a set of questionings that would not be in a situation of imitation, but active elements in present debates about cultural areas, modernity or social processes of change. The last great historiographical stake of this seminar we wanted to introduce today is precisely such: to use the study of everyday life in ottoman towns to on the one hand understand better the functioning of ottoman urban societies and on the other hand contribute to the great debate of our time around the disenchantment of global explanative systems and the possible construction of something more articulated. And here an ottoman perspective can be central, for example in displacing the focus from the everyday consequences of changes in the macro organisation of economic systems to the critical exploration of the link between these changes, the public sphere, the social boundaries, individual and collective identities and the relationship to the previous social order. Of course, we don't start from zero, and a lot has already been done.

An important methodological and factual basis is the work of Raphaela Lewis¹⁶. It is also the considerable amount of research explorations in everyday life have already produced, from Karen Barkey to James Grehan, from Elisabeth Frierson to Cengiz Kirlı¹⁷. **Panorama of Everyday Life ottoman studies**¹⁸.

¹⁵ Eckert (Andreas) Jones (Adam), « Historical Writing about Everyday Life », *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 2002, 15-1, p.5-16.

¹⁶ Lewis (Raphaela), *Everyday life in Ottoman Turkey*, B.T. Batsford Ltd. New-York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1971, 206p.

¹⁷ Cengiz (Kirlı),

¹⁸ Barkey (Karen) and Van Rossem (Ronan), *Networks of Contention: Villages and Regional Structure in the Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Empire*, *The American Journal of Sociology*, 102-5, 1977, pp.1345-1382.

Sajdi (Dana), "A Room of His Own: the 'History' of the Barber of Damascus (fl. 1762)", London, IB Tauris, 2008,

James Grehan, *Everyday life*

Exteryoglu

Seni fashion

Madeline Z. Zilfi, "Whose Laws? Gendering the Ottoman Sumptuary Regime," *Ottoman Costumes: From Textile to Identity*, (eds. Suraiya Faroqhi and Christoph K. Neumann), Eren, 2004, pp. 125-141.

Suraiya Faroqhi, *Subjects of the Sultan: Culture and Daily Life in the Ottoman Empire*, 2000. (*Osmanlı Kültürü ve Gündelik Yaşam: Ortaçağdan Yirminci Yüzyıla: Tarih Vakfı Yayınları*)

So the stake today for Ottoman Studies, specially urban, is not only to test methodological models elaborated on other fields, but in return to also participate in present debates with methodological impulses taken from the Ottoman experience.

One of the main stakes indeed of our series will be not only to apply to ottoman case studies recent methodological impulses, but to use these case studies in order to build a renewed

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- Cemal Kafadar, "Self and Others," *The Diary of a Dervish in Seventeenth-century Istanbul and First-person Narratives in Ottoman Literature*, *Studia Islamica*, LXIX (1986), pp. 191-218. Fikret Yılmaz, "Boş Vaktiniz Var mı? Veya 16. Yüzyılda Anadolu'da Şarap, Eğlence ve Suç," *Tarih ve Toplum*, 1, 2005, pp. 11-49. Necmi Erdoğan, "Devleti İdare Etmek: Mâduniyet ve Düzenbazlık," *Toplum ve Bilim*, 83, 1999-2000, pp. 8-31. Cemal Kafadar, "Mütereddid Bir Mutassavvıf: Üsküplü Asiye Hatun'un Rüya Defteri 1641-43," *Topkapı Sarayı Yıllığı*, 5 (1992), pp. 168-222.
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- Nancy Mickelwright, "Personal, Public, and Political (Re)Constructions: Photographs and Consumption," *Consumption Studies and the History of the Ottoman Empire, 1550-1922: An Introduction*, (ed.) Donald Quataert, 2000, pp. 261-287.
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- Robert Darnton, "History of Reading," *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, (ed.) Peter Burke, 1991, pp. 140-167.
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- Giovanni Levi, "On Microhistory," *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, (ed.) Peter Burke, 1991, pp. 93-113.
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paradigm, able to help understand better the situation in two directions: the historical study of everyday life in general (what do Ottoman towns teach) and the study of the functioning of ottoman towns and societies.

In the end, our contribution could also be to find a pertinent way to participate in debates about cultural studies, the relativization of culturalist visions and the “location of cultures’ as Bhabha says¹⁹.

But of course, it is an aim for the horizon of this year (and surely a lot more), and not of this first session. For today, we suggest our debates to start from an historiographical panorama and from an appreciation of what has already been done in ottoman urban studies in the direction of the study of daily life themes. You have surely already a lot to add to our presentation, and no doubt you identified additional directions we didn’t stress. So please, don’t hesitate to contribute to enrich the present attempt to propose a basis for future discussions around concrete case studies.

¹⁹ Bhabha.....

Harry Harootunian, “Shadowing History: National Narratives and the Persistence of the Everyday,” *Cultural Studies*, 18 (2004), pp. 181-200.

Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 1973, pp. 3-30.

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