Inventing Laziness

Neither laziness nor its condemnation is a new invention; however, perceiving laziness as a social condition that afflicts a "nation" is. In the early modern era, Ottoman political treatises did not regard the people as the source of the state's problems. Yet in the nineteenth century, as the imperial ideology of Ottomanism and modern discourses of citizenship spread, so did the understanding of laziness as a social disease that the "Ottoman nation" needed to eradicate. Asking what we can learn about Ottoman history over the long nineteenth-century by looking closely into the contested and shifting boundaries of the laziness – productivity binary, Melis Hafez explores how "laziness" can be used to understand emerging civic culture and its exclusionary practices in the Ottoman Empire. A polyphonic involvement of moralists, intellectuals, polemicists, novelists, bureaucrats, and, to an extent, the public reveals the complexities and ambiguities of this multifaceted cultural transformation. Using a wide variety of sources, this book explores the sustained anxiety about productivity that generated numerous reforms as well as new understandings of morality, subjectivity, citizenship, and nationhood among the Ottomans.

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The Culture of Productivity in Late Ottoman Society

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Preface

When asked about my research outside academic settings, I get two common reactions that speak volumes. One group, with an unwavering belief that the "East" has been marred with inherent laziness, and hence backward, quietly nod and listen only to affirm their own beliefs regardless of what I share about my work. The second set of reactions is more informative in comparison. The questioner starts with this query: So, what is it that made *us* lazy, really? Much to my surprise (and perhaps chagrin), this is not a sarcastic question. Many assume that I, as a historian, am searching for the historic roots of the watershed moment when *we* became lazy, as opposed to the periods in which *we* were industrious and active. Many conflate the question "what is it that made *us* lazy" with the question of "why are *we* in this situation." They often volunteer their response as well. Frequently, answers are categorically similar yet different in particulars. Answers vary from "it is because of Islam" to "because of not practicing Islam properly." It is very telling that, regardless of differences in ideological positions, those who ask this question (in various forms) share the assumption that, first, there was an essential and homogenous *we*, a vague notion mostly falling to the east of the east–west binary, and second, this *we* displays, dispositionally or situationally (depending on the perspective), a strong penchant for laziness. At the most basic level, the first group would share these two assumptions, but with an emphasis on *them*, rather than *us*. Despite diverse backgrounds and opposing views, both groups take these two assumptions as facts.

These dual assumptions, that there was a *we* and that its character suffered from laziness, were shared by the Ottoman culture producers I studied in this monograph. I have often thought that these comments – made in the twenty-first century – would have unnoticeably fit into a late nineteenth-/early twentieth-century Ottoman reformist text, despite the hundred years between them. This is not meant to historically collapse these outlooks a century apart into one continuum. Certainly,

those who voice these assumptions and questions today are culturally distant from those in the past that I studied, and these assumptions have different sociocultural and political implications in the twenty-first century. Still, the similarity of the questions and the assumptions is notable. I attribute these shared assumptions to the dominance of a new civic culture in general and the culture of productivity in particular, which developed, as I show in this book, in the context of the long nineteenth-century Ottoman world.

I am sure that no reader of this book would ask this question, but I answer it anyway: I do not believe that the Ottomans (whoever they were) were lazy (whatever that means). Nor do I believe that they were industrious. These categories, and their now globalized implications, as in "us vs. them" and their derivations, which still divide our human experience continuum today, are a direct result of nineteenth-century processes, by which Western European nation-states marginalized the rest of the world developmentally, and the reorganization of states and peoples made new cultural productions possible. As a historian, I am interested in the processes through which these categories, and the culture of productivity based on these categories, were formulated, debated, negotiated, practiced, and experienced in divergent ways in late Ottoman society. Through the examination of the culture of productivity, we may gain a new view of the dynamics of this transformative period of the last century of the Ottoman Empire in particular, and the long nineteenth century in general. Such an account of specific cultural transformations, with their conflicting viewpoints, reveals untold power dynamics and intricacies of a history that is modern, global, and Ottoman.

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Since I started my work on laziness (yes, I am deeply aware of this phrase's oxymoronic nature), I have been accumulating scholarly and personal debt to too many people and institutions. With the humbling acknowledgment that I cannot do justice to all of them and to all they have done for me, I would like to thank those who assisted me during the research and writing of this book. For any errors or inadequacies of this work, of course, the responsibility is entirely my own.

I first conceived some version of this book's theme more than a decade ago in Los Angeles, California as a graduate student at the Department of History, UCLA. It started as a term paper, and over the years, it first evolved into a dissertation, and now into a book. If not for the continuous support, intellectual inspiration, and excellent scholarship and mentorship of James L. Gelvin, this book would not have been possible. My interest in history took a turn when I, as an undergraduate who was not majoring in history, enrolled in Gelvin's courses at UCLA. I was thirsty, and it was the world of a historian he presented that made me choose history as a vocation. This book and my scholarship owe much to him. The Department of History at UCLA has been generous with me, and many of its professors had a major impact on my scholarship, even if I did not work with them closely. Working with Mariko Tamanoi, Stephen Frank, and the late Janice Reiff has been a great privilege. I would like to thank Perry Anderson and Carlo Ginzburg for allowing me to be a fly on the wall in their reading groups early in my Ph.D. years. Teofilo Ruiz was a major inspiration and a role model, and I am grateful to him for his endless support and for being one of the most generous professors I have ever known.

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I dedicate this book to my dearest parents, Füsun and Samir, and to my spouse Mehmet Ali. My father has always broadened my horizons and propelled me to be better in whatever I do. My mother instilled the love of learning in me and has always been my model, inspiration, and

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A Note on Translations and Transliteration

All the translations from Ottoman Turkish are mine, except when noted otherwise. The transliterations in this book are mostly based on the system used by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. As suggested by *IJMES*, for Ottoman words, I use modern Turkish orthography. Where possible, I use Anglicized terms and place names (e.g., effendi and pasha, rather than efendi and paşa, unless they are part of bibliographic information). In most cases (Mustafa Âli, Âli Pasha, and Ahlak-ı Alâi being exceptions), with apologies to specialists in the field, I refrained from using the circumflex mark (Tr. *şapka işareti*) on vowels (e.g., *â* and *î*), since it adds an unnecessary layer of visual clutter for the untrained eye. It is also unreliable in addressing the pronunciation problems of modern Turkish words of Arabic and Persian origin. Therefore, *ahlak*, not *âhlak*.