



Contemporary
Turkish Studies

LSE Contemporary Turkish Studies Public Seminar

Wednesday, 11 March 2015

17:30-19:00

Venue: Room COW1.11, 1st Floor, Cañada Blanch Room,
Cowdray House, LSE

“Haunted Heritage: Ruination and Commodification of Stone Houses in Mardin”

Speaker: Dr. Z. Özlem Biner (University of Cambridge)

Chair: Associate Professor Esra Özyürek (LSE)

Drawn on a decade of ethnographic research in the province of Mardin, South-eastern Turkey, Dr. Biner’s work provides a detailed account of politics of life in the protracted war between the Turkish state and the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) from the perspectives of Kurds, Arabs, Syriac Christians. She focuses on the experience of the locals who own, live, at the same time dig their stone houses in the old city of Mardin. She explores the tensions and dilemmas that emerge in the attempt to (dis)possess these houses regarded as the emblem of the cultural heritage of the city. She analyses the practice of digging through its affects that refer to forces of relations, such as apparition, dreaming, attachments, fantasies that haunt persons, places and things. She describes that regardless of the ethnicity and religious background, for the Mardinities, digging is pervasive lifelong practice where they continue their search for the unknown across time and space. The daily rumours, dreams, international visitors, archaeologists, experts, the previous Christian owners of the houses, rocketing prices of the property, the long lasting infrastructural work that leads to the disclosure of the narrow alleys, the dust, the rubble, the stone, the beliefs about the jinn as the guardian of the treasure would all add up to the list of the evocative objects and subjects that would trigger the action of digging. In this conflict-ridden environment, Dr. Biner argues, people project their desire of survival into the obsession of finding the treasure as if the search for the hidden or the absent would suspend the current conditions of poverty, structural inequalities, political violence and past atrocities that caused the ruination of the lives and houses.

Dr. Zerrin Özlem Biner is a Research Associate at the Division of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge. She received her Ph.D. from University of Cambridge in 2007. Dr. Biner is an anthropologist with research interests in the ethnography of the state, history, violence and memory, minorities and diasporic communities, cultural heritage and materiality, and reconciliation. Her research engages with the material, cultural and psychic effects of political violence in Turkey. She is currently in the final stages of drafting her first book manuscript and is also working on a co-authored book on the material and immaterial remnants of past violence in Turkey.

This event is free and open to all. No ticket is required.

For further information about the LSE Contemporary Turkish Studies and its seminars and other activities, please contact:

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