

Kitabiyat/Book Reviews

Emotions in the Ottoman Empire: Politics, Society, and Family in the Early Modern Era

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Emotion is a challenging subject to study since it is an abstract concept. In other respects, despite this difficulty, it is also quite attractive and exciting. Likewise, philosophers, authors, scientists, and artists have produced and continue to create various works on the issue of what emotion is on the conceptual and aesthetic level. A different perspective on emotion is directly associated with the cognitive studies conducted, especially after 1980. These studies show that emotions do not occur "against the rational mind" as assumed but within the rational mind. In other words, they prove that emotions are part of mental processes. This situation naturally altered the

point of view on the concept of emotion. Emotions, which were digressed of their position against the irrational mind, started to be studied again on a different level in many fields. Cultural studies carried out under the influence of the same wind pointed out that emotions can change from culture to culture; they started to destroy the presuppositions that emotions are “universal” to a certain extent. All these advancements paved the way for the emergence of a field titled “The History of Emotions .” With the field of the history of emotions, the emotions felt and expressed in the past began to be historicized. The area focused on change as well as continuities and discontinuities. Plenty of valuable works have been produced in the context of Turkey on this field, which has become very popular in the West for the last 25 years. In this sense, Nil Tekgöl’s book *Emotions in the Ottoman Empire: Politics, Society, and Family in the Early Modern Era*, published by Bloomsbury Academic, is the first book written in the Ottoman field, directly taking the history of emotions as a reference to itself.

Examining with a holistic approach, the book is focused on the concept of “protection,” and the author claims “the contested concept of “protection”, related to how and who to protect, was culturally specific and historically contingent and stood at the center of all debates about how the Ottoman Empire and society itself employed the politics of difference.” The author suggests that it was “emotions” that had given meaning to this concept. The main argument of the work may also be read as an attempt to find a different response in the axis of “protection” and “emotions” to the question of “How the Empire survived for so many years,” which is one of the critical research questions in Ottoman history. She claims in her book that a culturally specific understanding of the concept of “protection” was closely associated with emotions, namely, *merhamet* and *mahabbet* for relations between the state and the subjects, *rıza*, and *şükran* for intra-communal relations and *mahabbet* and *musafat* for familial ties. Moving on to the book’s content, the concept of “protection” is handled in 3 main axes. These are state-subjects of an empire (*devlet-reaya*), intra-communal relations, male-female relations in general and familial relations in particular. Tekgöl discusses these types of relationships concerning the inequality of power in Ottoman society. Even though the differences in Ottoman society were primarily discussed in terms of Muslim and non-Muslim ties so far in the historiography, a different interpretation was brought to the issue of disagreements mainly focusing on un-

equal power relations, including the ones between men and women, state and the subjects. The book's subject is the concept of "protection" in the relationship of the strong with the weak and the determination of the emotions that the parties associate this concept with.

The author claims that emotional knowledge and emotional norms are two of the crucial determinants of how one feels. The book's first chapter is on the concept of "emotion knowledge." The remaining chapters, on the other hand, focus on emotional norms. In the second chapter, the author debates the state subjects of an empire relationship and the emotions of love (*mahabbet*) and compassion (*merhamet*). Intra-communal relations were associated with feelings of contentment (*rıza*) and gratitude (*şükran*) in the third chapter, and the sense of shame (*utanç*) is discussed in the fourth chapter. Focusing on Ottoman family relations in the fifth chapter, the author explains male-female relations with the emotions of love, pure affection, and sincerity (*musafat*). In the last chapter, focusing on the 19th century and afterward, changing emotions associated with the concept of "protection" are discussed.

The book's most fundamental line is based on an empire's state-subject relationship (*devlet-reaya*). From my standpoint, this basic form of relationship is also reflected in social relations and family. The concept of protection (*siyanet*) is positioned on the emphasis that the sultan, as a trustee of Allah (*vedayi-i Halik-i Kibriya*), has to watch over and protect all his subjects, regardless of their differences. From the author's point of view, the sultan's protection of his subjects gave meaning to the emotions of "love" and "compassion." Likewise, similar protection is reflected in the subgroups, society, and the family. While the sultan protects his subjects, his subjects are expected to obey him in this reciprocal relationship.

The author reveals the concept of protection and traces its associated emotions by using two primary sources: The Book of Ethics (*Ahlak-i Ala'i*) and Ottoman judicial court case records (*Osmanlı şeriyet sicilleri*). The Book of Ethics is a vital source because the emotion of love, which the author puts forward as the emotion at the basis of the concept of protection, is widely included in The Book of Ethics. In this source, love is a repulsive emotion that provides protection and obedience. Furthermore, together with love, "compassion" and other emotions associated with it are also mentioned: Clemency (*re'fet*), tenderness (*şefkat*), munificence (*mürüvvet*), be-

neficence (*mekremet*), grace (*inayet*), generosity (*fütüvvet*). Apart from these, the author utilizes resources such as imperial decrees, chronicles, petitions, travelogues, self-narratives, and fetva collections.

The author assumes that with all these expressions of emotion, people may have experienced feelings in line with the meaning they attribute to these concepts. One of the most impressive parts of the book is based on this basic assumption. In the author's estimation, a person feels something and defines it under a concept by giving meaning to the emotion s/he feels. It brings with it a specific reciprocal relationship. Whatever the expressed emotion is, its exigences begin to be handled this time. Yet, like other researchers working in the field of the history of emotions, Tekgül is of the opinion that there is a connection between felt and expressed sentiments.

Another remarkable aspect of the book is that emotions are associated with "emotion knowledge ." The basic assumption here is that apart from norms, how one conceptualizes and theorizes emotions also has an effect on what one feels. She thus explores the basic philosophical framework of early modern Ottoman society through which they interpreted emotions, which were closely linked with both the medical knowledge based on Galenic humoral theory and their religious knowledge. Under Galenic humoral theory, the human body contains four humors (phlegm, blood, yellow bile, and black bile), and each represents one of the four natural elements (earth, fire, wind, and water). Health represented an equilibrium or balance of the humor in the body, while illness, in their understanding, resulted from an imbalance. The author claims that "emotions were conceptualized as inseparable from both morality and its practices" and were "realized through actions, practices and in their relations starting from the familial, to the societal and finally to political ." Thus, feeling, knowing, or discriminating between good and evil was only realized if acted upon. Emotions, she suggests, were "conceptualized either emotion-vices or emotion virtues." She claims that "emotions were not understood as belonging to the inner space of humans that requires self-reflection to be expressed, but rather as something always to be expressed through their relationships and practices." This mindset, however, she claims, started to change in the 19th century with the rising popularity of psychology, with which emotions were perceived as obstacles to reason, which should be suppressed, and they were no longer theorized within a moral framework.

It should be stated that the author's arguments regarding the history of emotions are pretty exciting. Notably, the relationship established between emotional expressions and felt emotions opens the doors of a controversial area over the uncertainty of what people's real feelings will be. Nevertheless, thinking about such issues also means the destruction of memorized perceptions to a certain extent. Similarly, the concept of "protection" is a highly controversial notion. For instance, who are the people to be protected? What conditions are they subject to? Etc. Despite the fact that an intangible concept such as emotion has been examined together with another controversial notion such as protection causes some questions in mind, the author's fearless approach to such abstract notions and her style that does not refrain her from analyzing such abstract concepts is encouraging to those who will work in this field.

This approach is substantial for researchers who will work on the Ottoman Empire, especially in the field of the history of emotions, as it is an exemplary study of how different concepts can be studied. Moreover, the following points should be noted. This study is the first to be directly articulated in the field of the history of emotions in the Ottoman field. The fact that we do not have any inventory of emotions regarding this period, and therefore our knowledge of the terms and concepts of feeling in the Ottoman field is minimal, shows what a significant burden was taken with the mentioned book.

Consequently, the book is of great importance, especially for researchers working in the fields of history, literature, cultural history, the history of emotions, and gender studies. This book, which can attract the attention of the academic community in terms of its style and the way the subjects are handled, is also of a quality to attract the attention of the general reader. With this holistic perspective, especially free of details, the author has written not only for people who know the history of emotions but not the Ottoman history but also for researchers who know the history of the Ottoman Empire yet do not know the history of emotions. Tekgül's book, which was built on the assumption that emotions can also be historicized, is an essential source in terms of showing how an Ottoman historian may benefit from the possibilities of the history of emotions.