Understanding the Social and Political Relevance of Anti-Semitic Conspiratorial Accounts on Dönmes (Conversos)

I would like to compare the two historical discourses of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories on Dönmes in Turkey. The early conspiratorial accounts on the community, which shaped the first period, started in the beginning of the twentieth century mainly as a reaction to modernisation. The second period of conspiratorial accounts came after 1990s as a part of globalisation of Turkey. My presentation will basically investigate the differences in the history of conspiracy theories about the Dönme community to understand the socio-political mechanisms, reasons and significance of blame in different periods. While doing so, different claims-makers’ conspiracy theories about the group and the variety of their problematisations will be identified. In this regard, both contexts and agents of conspiratorial accounts will be discussed. In order to do that, first, I will present Dönme history along with the social constructions about the community. Second, I will consider possible reasons behind distinct constructions in different periods by using cosmopolitanism perspective and Bauman’s division of liquid and solid modernity. In conclusion, I will claim that conspiracy theories on Dönmes tend to appear in periods of major transformations as reactions of the alienated groups. Accordingly, when conspiratorial accounts about Dönmes emerged in the early 20th century, they reacted against the solid modernity and today these theories retort to the changes brought by liquid modernity.