

Ringvorlesung Turkologie 2025S | Contemporary trends in the study of modern Turkish literature, March 13th, 2025 – June 12, 2025, 5PM-6:30PM, Hybrid Event, University of Vienna, Department of Near Eastern Studies (Hörsaal)

## **Modernizing Empires: Enlightenment, Nationalist Vanguard and Non-Western Literary Modernities**

### **Abstract**

Sometime in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, intellectuals in Eastern Europe, Asia, and the Middle East discovered to their great astonishment how "backward" they were compared to Western Europe. As the cultural hegemony of the West grew, they grappled with questions of national self-definition, debating how to revive their past glory and reform their authentic culture to catch up with Western modernity, and how to emulate European literary models and create a native canon. They began to ask similar questions: How do we redefine our literature in relation to Western European forms? Are we backward, and if so, what are we missing? How have we lost our past glory? How can we revive our authentic and traditional culture while reconciling ourselves with Western modernity? These debates then sparked a series of cultural reform projects, including language reform and the systematic translation of European literatures.

This lecture will introduce the "Modernizing Empires" project, a comparative study of cultural reform, linguistic renewal, and literary renaissance movements in three imperial traditions caught between the East-West divide: Russia, Turkey, and Japan. As the first comprehensive and comparative multilingual study of non-Western literary modernities, and the first to bring these specific traditions together, the project challenges Eurocentric models of literary history that interpret these cases as deviations, failures, or late emulations. The lecture will present the project's multi-method research strategy to conduct historical and literary comparisons between these emerging national literary systems, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to map transnational networks of narrative strategies, conceptual systems, and translation practices.

### **About the Author**

[Özen Nergis Dolcerocca](#) is Associate Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Bologna. She is the PI of the ERC project 'Modernizing Empires' ([NONWESTLIT](#)), the author of [Comparative Modernism and Poetics of Time: Bergson, Tanpinar, Benjamin, Walser](#) (2023), and serves as Associate Editor of the *European Review* journal sponsored by Academia Europaea.