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**Nationalism and
Territory in the
Post-Ottoman Space**

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- The (de)legitimising discourses on borders in South East Europe and the wider Mediterranean;
- The impact of imperial legacies and memories on border conflicts;
- The transformation and resolution of border conflicts.

The RAMSES2 sub-project run by St Antony's brings together a group of scholars from the European Studies Centre, the Middle East Centre, Maison Française and the Department of Politics and International Relations. The steering committee includes Kalypso Nicolaidis (Chair), Othon Anastasakis, Richard Caplan, Philip Robins and Michael Willis.

NATIONALISM AND TERRITORY IN THE POST-OTTOMAN SPACE

KEREM ÖKTEM

In this paper, I suggest that Southeast Europe is a regional focus through which comparative analysis on various social and political processes appears to be meaningful, while I question the suitability of the recent interest in the Mediterranean for such an endeavour. I seek to develop, in an inductive manner, a matrix of overlapping historical experiences in South East Europe, which justify such a regional focus on the grounds of the interrelated experiences of 'common heritage', 'the Trauma of the Nation state', and 'contiguity' and the 'political goal towards EU convergence'.

In a second step, I appraise to what extent this matrix is applicable to the Mediterranean region, and if not, which other commonalities justify the Mediterranean as a meaningful analytical tool for area studies.

My point of departure is the relative randomness of regional assignments. Terms such as 'The Middle East' or the 'Fertile Crescent' are inventions by modern geographers of the early 20th century such as Halford Mackinder and others, and the emergence of these terms is closely linked with the 'othering' policies of colonialist projects.¹ The Mediterranean as a region does not exist. Therefore, it is important to explore under which conditions it can become a meaningful regional focus to engage for research on societies, political systems, and cultural interrelations. Take the case for Turkey, for instance. To many cosmopolitan Turks, the highly abstract concept of the Mediterranean serves as a much more attractive source of identification than the generally despised Middle East, or the World of Islam. However, when Turks identify themselves with the Mediterranean, they think of Greece, Italy, the French littoral and Spain, and certainly not of Morocco or Egypt. In Israeli Academia, there are two mutually exclusive regional preferences, with different epistemological positions attached to them: The emphasis on the Mediterranean prioritises Israel's Mediterranean identity and thereby draws it closer to the European continent. The Middle East is prioritised by critical Israeli scholars, especially at Ben Gurion University in

¹ For an appraisal of the etymology of these regional constructs and their colonialist background see: **Scheffler, Thomas** 2003 'Fertile Crescent', 'Orient', 'Middle East': The Changing Mental Maps of Southwest Asia', *European Review of History* 10 (2): 252-272.

Beer Sheeva, where scholars make a point in insisting on the embeddedness of Israel in the Arab world.²

Let me first turn to my D. Phil work on the making of Geographies of Nationalism in late 19th and early 20th century Turkey. My major concern there was to understand how the unfixed, multi-ethnic, multi-religious spaces of the late Ottoman Empire with fluid borders and ambiguous identities were transformed into fixed territories and homogenised, solidified nation-states. I have sought to understand how, through which institutions, actors and strategies, the nation-state imagines itself and projects itself onto the minds of its citizens and manifests itself in space. I now summarise some of my research insights with a number of historical theses on the transformation from Ottoman Empire to Turkish nation-state through the concepts of homogenisation, *demos*, *ethnos* and citizenship. I argue that Southeast Europe was formed through a chain of nationalising and homogenising projects of state formation, starting at the western periphery of the Empire, and then reshaping its core.

Thesis 1. Every nation-state is built on processes of homogenisation and/or murderous ethnic cleansing

Anthony Marx and Michael Mann both contend that the modern-nation state is based on processes of homogenisation, implemented by nationalising elites. Both accept no distinction between Eastern or Western Nationalism, Early or Late Nationalisms, civic or ethnic nationalisms.³ According to this perspective, the establishment of the nation-state requires an identifiable, more or less homogenised *demos*. In most historical cases, the line between *demos* and *ethnos* however is blurred, and even the most universalist model of nationalism, France, has a history of ethno-religious homogenisation,⁴ whose repercussions we can trace in the recent events in Paris and other French cities. The difference with the more recent cases of homogenisation in South East Europe including Turkey (and for that matter, Israel) is that the St Bartholomew's night, or the eviction of Muslims and Jews from Spain occurred

² **Öktem, Kerem** 2005 'Faces of the city: Poetic, mediagenic and traumatic images of a multi-cultural city in Southeast Turkey', *Cities* 22 (3): 241-253. This is a special issue based on the Beer Sheeva workshop on 'Cities in the Middle East', and includes an introduction, which contextualises the Israeli experience in the context of the Middle East, rather than the Mediterranean.

³ **Mann, Michael** 2001 'Explaining Murderous Ethnic Cleansing: The Macro-level', in Montserrat Guibernau and John Hutchinson (eds) *Understanding Nationalism*, Cambridge: Polity Press, — 2004 *The dark side of democracy : explaining ethnic cleansing*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, **Marx, Anthony W.** 2003 *Faith in nation : exclusionary origins of nationalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁴ For an excellent paper on the exclusionary and inclusive politics of citizenship in the Turkish case cf. **Kadioğlu, Ayşe** Forthcoming 'Denationalization of Citizenship. The Turkish Experience'. Also: **Yeğen, Mesut** 2004 'Citizenship and Ethnicity in Turkey', *Middle Eastern Studies* 40 (6): 51-66.

in the 15th to 17th centuries. Anthony Marx makes the case that it was only on the precondition of often murderous ethnic cleansing that the liberal democracies of France and Britain could be established.⁵

Thesis 2. The making of the nation-state in Southeast Europe is characterised by a chain of homogenising projects

Donald Bloxham, in his recent book *The Great Game of Genocide*, characterises the late 19th and early 20th century as a

‘Wider history of inter-group massacre and forced displacement in the chain from central Asia through the Caucasus, Anatolia, the Balkans, and eastern and central Europe from the mid-nineteenth century during the crisis and collapse of the Ottoman, Romanov and Habsburg empires’.⁶

It is in this context that the modern nation-states of South East Europe have emerged. In Turkey, this process was further magnified by the scale and scope of the country, and the deeply multi-ethnic and multi-religious character of its subject populations.

Thesis 3. Homogenisation for the nation-state is achieved by a range of strategies extending from gradual assimilation to forced expulsions, population exchanges, murderous ethnic cleansing and genocide.

In the case of the late Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic, most of these strategies have been employed by nationalising elites and the nationalising-state in order to achieve ‘core group cohesion’⁷ for an identifiable *ethnos/demos*. Take as examples:

- The ethnic cleansing of the Balkan provinces, Greece and the Caucasus from its Muslim communities⁸
- The Armenian massacres of 1896 and the genocidal murders and deportations of 1915, targeting the empire’s Armenian and to a lesser extent, Syriac communities.⁹

⁵ Marx, Anthony W. 2003 *Faith in Nation : Exclusionary Origins of Nationalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁶ Bloxham, Donald 2005 *The Great Game of Genocide. Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of Ottoman Armenians*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. Also: Bloxham, Donald 2002 'Three imperialisms and a Turkish nationalism: international stresses, imperial disintegration and the Armenian genocide', *Patterns of Prejudice* 36 (4): 37-58.

⁷ Mann, Michael 2001 'Explaining Murderous Ethnic Cleansing: The Macro-level', in Montserrat Guibernau and John Hutchinson (eds) *Understanding Nationalism*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

⁸ McCarthy, Justin 1983 *Muslims and Minorities : the Population of Ottoman Anatolia and the End of the Empire*, New York: New York University Press.

⁹ The scholarly debate on this issue is highly polarised. For a historically substantiated overview see: Bloxham, Donald 2005 *The Great Game of Genocide. Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of Ottoman Armenians*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. Also: Dadrian, Vahakn N. 2002 'The Armenian

- The episodes of murderous ethnic cleansing perpetrated by the armies of both sides during the Greco-Turkish War.
- The destruction of the Pontic Greek community on the Black Sea littoral.
- The Lausanne treaty and the 'exchange' of populations between Greece and the nascent Turkish Republic.¹⁰
- The campaigns and deportations of Kurds from their ancestral territories into the interior of the country in the 1920s and 30s.¹¹
- The waves of discrimination against and expulsion of Greek speaking Orthodox, Armenian and Jewish communities with the Wealth Tax in the 1940s, the pogroms of the 1950s, and the expulsions of the 1960s and 70s.¹²
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This list is perfunctory, but in my view, summarises the overarching agenda of homogenising the population of the territory of modern Turkey, by obliterating its non-Muslim communities and by forcibly assimilating its Muslim communities (such as the Kurds, the Alevi and others). These strategies mirror comparable policies of its Balkan neighbours.

Thesis 4. It is the locale, the place, the city, the village, the map where Homogenisation can best be studied and its implications be measured

The nation-state and its ideology functions on multiple levels. As Mesut Yegen has shown, a critical analysis of major texts of Turkish nationalism, such as the constitution and some major leading texts may come to the conclusion that the Turkish Republic followed an inclusive concept of citizenship, and hence membership in the nation, close to the universalist French model.¹³ A critique of the French case aside, however, the analysis of

Question and the Wartime Fate of the Armenians as documented by the Officials of the Ottoman Empire's World War I Allies: Germany and Austria-Hungary', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34: 59-85, — 2003 *The history of the Armenian genocide : ethnic conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus*, Providence ; Oxford: Berghahn Books.

¹⁰ **Hirschon, Renée** (ed) 2003 *Crossing the Aegean : an Appraisal of the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey*, New York; Oxford: Berghahn, **Keyder, Çağlar** 2003 'The Consequences of the Exchange of Populations for Turkey', in Renée Hirschon (ed) *Crossing the Aegean : an Appraisal of the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey*, New York; Oxford: Berghahn.

¹¹ **Dündar, Fuat** 2001 *İttihat ve Terakki'nin Müslümanları Iskan Politikası (1913 - 1918) [The settlement policy of the Union and Progress concerning Muslims]*, Istanbul: İletisim.

¹² **Akar, Ridvan** 1992 *Varlık Vergisi Kanunu. Tek parti rejiminde azınlık karsiti politika örneği*, Istanbul: Belge Yayınları, **Aktar, Ayhan** 2002 *Varlık Vergisi ve Türkleştirme Politikaları*, 6 (August 2002) Edition, Istanbul: İletisim Yayınları. **Demir, Hülya and Akar, Ridvan** 1994 *Istanbul'un son sürgünleri [The least exiles of Istanbul]*, Istanbul: İletisim.

¹³ **Yeğen, Mesut** 2004 'Citizenship and Ethnicity in Turkey', *Middle Eastern Studies* 40 (6): 51-66.

lower-level legal texts such as the 'Settlement Law of 1934', legal provisions, administrative procedures unveil that the ostensibly non-ethnic demos has been solidified to exclude all communities that are not part of the narrow core-group of Sunni Muslim Turks.¹⁴ Having said that, if exclusion was one axis of Turkish citizenship, inclusion on the precondition of assimilation was another. Which axis became prevalent has been dependent on larger internal societal and political trends and external power interventions.¹⁵

Yet, policies below the level of legal texts, citizenship policies or population exchanges are probably even more important if we want to understand how the fluid heterogeneity of the empire became imagined and administered as the homogenous territory of the nation-state. Just to cite a few interrelated strategies and clusters of institutional actors:

- Re-imagining history along the lines of ethnogenetic myths: The Turkish History Thesis (Central Asia), The Turkish History Society, educational institutions.¹⁶
- Imagining a new language: The Turkish Linguistic Society.¹⁷
- Renaming the 'geo-body' of the nation:¹⁸ The Commission for the change of foreign place names (precedents go back to 1915, instituted in the 1950s).
- Maps implementing the new geo-body of the nation.
- Appropriating and renaming the architectural heritage of the other, like churches, synagogues, cemeteries, schools, houses.

Homogenisation, at the same time, is hardly ever completely successful and leaves pockets of resistance and diversity. It results, however, in a state of constant tension between the hegemonic national project and the dealings of every-day life in the local. Despite the wide use of the aforementioned strategies of homogenisation, minorities still exist, everywhere in South East Europe and Turkey. Depending on how large these minority groups are, the

¹⁴ **Dündar, Fuat** 2001 *İttihat ve Terakki'nin Müslümanlari Iskan Politikasi (1913 - 1918) [The settlement policy of the Union and Progress concerning Muslims]*, Istanbul: İletisim, **Okutan, M. Çağatay** 2004 *Tek Parti Döneminde Azınlık Politikaları [Minority Policies during the One Party Period]*, Istanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları.

¹⁵ **Çağaptay, Soner** 2004 'Race, Assimilation and Kemalism: Turkish Nationalism and the Minorities in the 1930s', *Middle Eastern Studies* 40 (3): 86-101.

¹⁶ **Poulton, Hugh** 1997 *Top Hat, Grey Wolf and Crescent : Turkish Nationalism and the Turkish Republic*, London: Hurst.

¹⁷ **Heyd, Uriel** 1954 *Language Reform in Modern Turkey*, Jerusalem: Israel Oriental Society.

¹⁸ Cf. for the 'geo-body' approach **Thongchai, Winichakul** 1994 *Siam Mapped : a History of the Geo-body of a Nation*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

tensions can be more or less easily contained (the Kurdish Insurgency being one of the cases less easy to contain).

Yet, the idea that there is an *ethnos/demos* that includes the core group and excludes (albeit in different ways) peripheral groups in most nation-states remains to be the hegemonic view: It remains to be seen how this will work out in the Western Balkans, in Macedonia, Kosovo and Bosnia.

In concluding this part, I would like to argue that the strategies of homogenisation through, the inter-related processes of out-group exclusion and in-group cohesion, and through the re-imagination of history, the re-naming the toponymy and re-constructing the material heritage were employed by most nationalising states in Southeast Europe, in order to carve out of the common heritage of the Ottoman empire a clearly demarcated nation-territory.¹⁹

It is this framework of common heritage and comparable nationalising projects that justify the regional focus on South East Europe and that make such research meaningful. We may certainly add to this the perspective of EU accession that in many ways has facilitated the emergence of such a regional perspective. In the case of South East Europe including Turkey, then we can discern at least three axes of overlapping historical experiences: the historical heritage of the Ottoman Empire, the trauma of the nation-state (The experience of nation-state formation through exclusion and inclusion) and contiguity (The existence of contiguous states, transport networks, geography and trans-border communities brought about by expulsions and exchanges).

To this, we can add the convergence in political and intellectual terms towards EU membership and regional co-operation, and the existence of multiple legal and extralegal networks of movements of people, goods, popular culture within South East Europe.

In this second part of the paper, I explore some working hypotheses as to whether we can establish such a framework of overlapping historical experiences and/or convergence for the Mediterranean region.

¹⁹ **Brubaker, Rogers** 1997 'Aftermaths of Empire and the Unmixing of People', in Karen Barkey and Mark Von Hagen (eds) *After empire : multiethnic societies and nation-building : the Soviet Union and the Russian, Ottoman, and Habsburg empires*, Boulder, Colo. ; Oxford: Westview Press.

Let us start with the unifying aspect of the Mediterranean region: I suggest that it is the location on the Mediterranean littoral. The Mediterranean region can be defined from a geographical point of view through a number of sub-regions.

- The Aegean littoral with Greece and Turkey.
- The Adriatic littoral including Italy, Albania, Bosnia, Croatia, Slovenia.
- The 'EU Med' littoral (France, Spain).
- The Med South, the Arab Med and Israel
 - The Levante (Syria, Lebanon, Israel/Palestine)
 - The Mashriq (Egypt, Libya)
 - The Maghrib (Northern Africa).

Now, the definitions of sub-regions I offer here are partly random, partly historical (Levante, Maghrib, Mashriq), and partly political (EU-Med). Even this incomplete differentiation into sub-regions shows the extent of fragmentation and widely diverging social and political structures.

Yet, let us apply the matrix of overlapping experiences, which I have developed for South East Europe and the Ottoman Empire, and summarised in the aforementioned four theses. Would the Mediterranean make sense as a regional focus of analysis and show a similar degree of a common past and a common future?

It is safe to argue that we cannot speak of a common recent heritage of the late 19th century in the region. In addition the trauma of the nation-state is no unifying feature either: The experience of nation-state formation through exclusion and inclusion followed very different and differential paths; the formative moment of the Arab Mediterranean was Colonialism; nationalism came at a much later response (Arab Nationalism vs. Anti-colonial Nationalism).²⁰ National identities were formed in the struggle against the colonial powers rather than against neighbour states. The experience of Colonialism and its repercussion has created particular links between the exchange and othering between some colonial centres

²⁰ **Kedourie, Sylvia** 1976 *Arab Nationalism : an Anthology*, Berkeley: University of California Press. Also: **Kayali, Hasan** 1997 *Arabs and Young Turks : Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918*, Berkeley ; London: University of California Press.

and some sub-regions.²¹ Finally, there is no contiguity: The existence of contiguous states, transport networks, geography and trans-border communities do not apply. Unlike in the 19th century, when the port cities in the Mediterranean were connected by intense maritime trade, and cities like Salonika, Izmir, Beirut and Alexandria formed a network of cosmopolitan urban centres,²² the littoral is now more integrated with its hinterland and its national economies than with urban centres on the other side of the shore.

Let us now turn to the last two points in the matrix, those of overlapping political aspirations and trans-border networks. These were the convergence in political terms towards EU membership and/or regional co-operation, and the existence of multiple legal and extralegal networks of movements of people and goods, especially with an eye on illegal immigration, terrorism and security concerns of EU countries. EU membership for the Arab countries on the Mediterranean littoral is not an option, as the unsuccessful application of Morocco and its immediate rejection by the EU amply illustrates. It would then seem that it is the security concerns of EU countries with territories on the Mediterranean shoreline that are the crucial driving force for defining and constructing a Mediterranean region. If this were to be the case, such an endeavour would indeed appear rather as a Eurocentric, even neo-colonialist security agenda mainly pertaining to the Arab countries on the Mediterranean littoral.

Conclusion

As I tried to show earlier in my discussion of South East Europe, the project of imagining and constructing a region (or for that matter, a nation) can be successful, if there is a common goal, the countries in question share. South East Europe as a region has been imagined and shaped largely by the European Union and the process of medium term convergence, initiated by the prospect of future membership. It has been taken up by the political and intellectual elites of these countries, and is underpinned by multiple networks of economic and academic exchange, and some degree of cultural familiarity. The role of mutual Diaspora communities, like Turkish Bulgarians in Turkey, Greek Muslims in Western Thrace, Istanbul *Rum* in Turkey is also important. So is the heritage of the 'trauma of the nation-state'. The question, therefore, remains, whether in the absence of such overlapping

²¹ It would not be an exaggeration to discern post-colonial clusters of intense economic, political and migratory relations between colonised periphery and colonising centre: France and Spain with the Maghreb; France with Lebanon and Syria; Britain with Israel/Palestine.

²² **Kasaba, Resat, Keyder, Caglar and Tabak, Faruk** 1986 'Eastern Mediterranean Port Cities and Their Bourgeoisies: Merchants, Political Projects, and Nation-States', *Review X* (1): 121-135.

historical experiences as laid out in the four theses, and without the carrot of membership, the Mediterranean can become a regional unit of analysis and/or a region of political convergence between highly developed democracies and different variations of mostly autocratic rule.

I would then suggest that, rather than taking at face value the Mediterranean as a region, some scholarly effort should be spent in de-constructing the 'Mediterranean project', and in exposing the diverging vested political interests of different involved actors such as scholars, EU decision makers and the political elites in the Arab Mediterranean countries, which appear to engage in it.