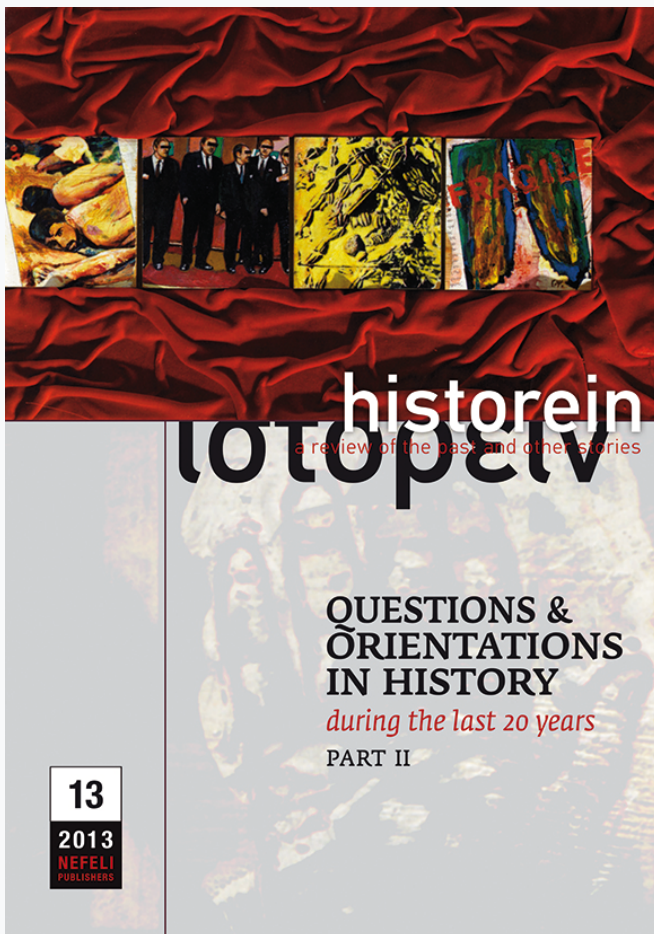


Historein

Vol 13 (2013)

Questions and Orientations in History during the last 20 years. Part 2



Review of N. Diamantouros, Th. Dragonas and F. Birtek (eds), Ελλάδα και Τουρκία: Εκσυγχρονιστικές γεωγραφίες και χωρικές αντιλήψεις του έθνους [Spatial conceptions of the nation: modernising geographies in Greece and Turkey]

Efi Kanner

doi: [10.12681/historein.203](https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.203)

Copyright © 2014, Efi Kanner



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

To cite this article:

Kanner, E. (2013). Review of N. Diamantouros, Th. Dragonas and F. Birtek (eds), Ελλάδα και Τουρκία: Εκσυγχρονιστικές γεωγραφίες και χωρικές αντιλήψεις του έθνους [Spatial conceptions of the nation: modernising geographies in Greece and Turkey]. *Historein*, 13, 123–126. <https://doi.org/10.12681/historein.203>

Nikiforos Diamantouros, Thalia Dragonas, Faruk Birtek (eds)

*Ελλάδα και Τουρκία:
Εκσυγχρονιστικές γεωγραφίες και
χωρικές αντιλήψεις του έθνους*

**[Spatial conceptions of the nation:
modernising geographies in Greece
and Turkey]**

Athens: Alexandria, 2012, 446 pp.

By Efi Kanner

University of Athens

This book is the third in a series of collective volumes edited in the context of an interdisciplinary dialogue among Greek and Turkish social scientists about the development processes of their countries. Both previous volumes treated the subject of the transition from the multiethnic Ottoman Empire to the Greek and Turkish nation-states.¹ The first volume focused on state building and citizenship in Greece and Turkey, whereas the second examined the ways modernity and Europeaness were perceived in each case. This third volume, which is divided into three parts, treats the delicate topic of spatial conceptions of the Greek and Turkish nations.

The first part examines the hard path of transition from imperial to national spatial conceptions. It was an uncertain and uneven transition, something that becomes obvious from the fact that imperial visions inspired spatial conceptions of both the Greek and Turkish nation-states.

Anastasia Stouraitis and Andreas Kazamias treat the Greek Great Idea (Megali Idea), the major expression of Greek nationalism from the nineteenth century until 1922, as a utopia.

The authors' main argument is that its internal cohesion derives rather from its mythical than its "real" elements (28). The Megali Idea is then examined as a multisemic notion comprising four components: irredentism, cultural westernisation, Greek-Orthodox ethnoreligious identity and the imperial vision of the regeneration of the Byzantine Empire. What all these actually constituted were the ingredients of the utopian dream of the Greater Hellenic state (*Megali Ellada*) – hence the lack of precise geographic limitations of the imaginary Greek nation and state. Through a series of spatial representations of the Hellenic state, from the Rigas Feraios map to the map of Greater Greece in 1920, the authors point out its blurred spatial figure, as it was imagined by the followers of the Megali Idea. This is attributed to the very utopian character of the latter, to its belonging to a "nonspatial" reality, something that permitted it to be constantly reformulated according to the various political imperatives of the period between 1844 and 1922, when Greece was defeated in Asia Minor, and even beyond.

Yonca Köksal examines the construction of new social spaces during the Ottoman Tanzimat (reform) era, in order to assess the coexistence, at a local level, of Ottomanism and separatist Balkan nationalisms. She asserts that state interventions during the Tanzimat period created new spatial arrangements especially in the port cities (avenues, squares, places of leisure, etc), that enabled interaction between people of various ethno-religious origins. This interaction corroborated Ottomanism, the loyalty to the empire and the sultan, which was the main objective of Ottoman reformers. On the other hand, the non-Muslim local elites who backed those interventions also played a crucial role within their own millets. They created institutions (mainly educational) that reinforced ethno-religious identities.

Most of those identities challenged Ottomanism and were transformed, in due course, into national ones.

Yannis Tsiomis refers to the new geography that legislation enacted during the regency attempted to impose on the newborn Greek state. This intervention, through a 1834 act, made a break with the Ottoman spatial arrangement and comprised the following: a clear division between unproductive mountainous areas and productive lowland regions; the country's administrative division into prefectures, provinces and municipalities; a modernisation stimulus for agriculture and industrialisation; the creation of new lowland and port cities; plans for a population transfer from mountainous areas to valleys. Those path-breaking measures were part and parcel of the modernisation project to which the regency was totally committed. Their implementation collided with "local realities" and thus failed.

Anastassios Anastassiadis treats the very delicate issue of the complicated negotiations over the ecclesiastical status of the regions that were integrated in Greece after the Balkan wars. It was actually a power game involving three parts: the Constantinople patriarchate, the Orthodox church of Greece and the Greek state. Complications derived from the fact that the expansion of the Greek church's jurisdiction over the so-called "new lands" would restrict the already diminished patriarchate's domains. On the other hand, the patriarchate's authority over the churches of the new lands would undermine the Greek church's position as the unique ecclesiastical authority in the Greek nation-state and also the control of the latter over the religious institutions functioning within its borders. Anastassiadis very succinctly follows these negotiations using the Foucauldian concept of "power micromechanics" to show that peripheral conflicts shape the

nationalist discourse as a whole (120–121). The final solution of the problem, i.e. the partial ecclesiastical affiliation of the new lands to the Greek church and the maintenance of the patriarchate's spiritual authority over them, constituted a victory of the nation-state logic. It was in fact an incomplete victory that created the complicated ecclesiastical status of the new lands. This status, along with the complexities caused by the Eastern bloc's collapse, is the root of the conflict that broke out between patriarchate and the Greek church in 2004.

M. Asım Karaömerlioğlu sees "Anatolianism" (*Anadoluculuk*) as a version of Turkish nationalism that followed the demise of Ottomanism. Unlike Pan-turanism, Anatolianism views Anatolia, and not the central Asian valleys, as the cradle of the Turks. According to this theory, the year 1071, the starting point of Seljuk rule in Anatolia, marks the beginning of Turkish history. This theory confers a prominent place to Islam and agrarian culture as parts of Turkish identity. Agrarianism led Nurettin Topçu, an emblematic figure of this trend of thought, to adopt a position combining antiliberalism, antic cosmopolitanism, antic communism and of course antisemitism. Though Topçu never held any public office, he decisively influenced rightwing thought in Turkey, especially the Turkish-Islamic synthesis theory.

Nur Yalman examines the construction of public space and political debates in contemporary Turkey in accordance with the stance vis-à-vis the Ottoman past. The ways the Ottoman past is imagined determines the visions of the Turkish nation, in diverse areas, from architecture to foreign policy. He *grosso modo* distinguishes four basic problematics: the Kemalist one; the one expressed by the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP), which "nourishes a nostalgia for an imaginary Otto-

man past" (194); the once concerning ethnic identities in Turkey, an issue tightly linked with the Kurdish one; the debate on the character of Islam in Turkey, i.e. on the compatibility of secularism and the Sunni state institutions or the existence of Sufi orders.

In the second part of the book, two examples concerning modern Cyprus are presented, showing the endeavours of Greek and Turkish nationalisms to Hellenise and Turkify, respectively, the island's space.

Yael Navaro-Yashin describes the way that the Turkish occupation since 1974 has transformed the landscape in northern Cyprus. Sovereignty is confirmed by the changing of place names in the region, the redistribution of land property and the display of Turkish identity symbols all over the place. It is an overtly political intervention led by the new, self-declared state's mapping agency, land registry and armed forces. The parallels with similar Israeli interventions in Palestine, as well as the emphasis on the colonial roots of such practices, are of particular interest. However, this official policy is not uncontested, since Turkish Cypriots are unwilling to use the new, imposed place names. In fact, the use of the old (pre-1974) ones constitutes a part of their identity, something that differentiates them from the Anatolian newcomers.

Caesar Mavratsas, for his part, describes Greek Cypriot national identity as an effect of divergence between history and geography. He asserts that affiliation with Greek irredentism led Greek Cypriots to conceive themselves as a part of a wider Greek national community and, thus, to develop a nationalism that defied geography, i.e. the presence of a strong Turkish Cypriot element and the proximity of Cyprus to Turkey. This had tragic consequences for both communities on the island.

The third part discusses versions of identity that, inscribed in the locality, have been alternatives to (though not incompatible with) the national one since the nineteenth century.

Paraskevas Konortas uses the case study of Thrace to point out the "war of identities" in the region from the nineteenth century to 1923. Thrace was, along with Macedonia, the bone of contention between the Constantinople patriarchy and the Bulgarian exarchate, a conflict that was given a "national" character by the representatives of Greek and Bulgarian nationalism. Konortas successfully describes the variety of identities attributed to the Orthodox populations of the region by the patriarchy, exarchate, Greek kingdom, Bulgarian state and Ottoman authorities. This provoked a battle of jurisdictions, with the Greek Orthodox elites of Istanbul, local communal authorities, as well as Greek or Bulgarian agents, attempting to attach them to different and often conflicting causes/identities. Education, armed force as well as mapping and statistics equally constituted weapons in this "identity war". The decisive factor in national affiliations was the power balance between the states that finally shared the region. This power balance was reflected in a series of diplomatic treaties that offered Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey an incomplete "national purity".

Georgios Agelopoulos inscribes the ethnological studies of Konstantinos Karavidas and Dinos Malouchos, as well as the ethnology school of the planned University of Smyrna, in the context of the necessity to integrate the Muslims of Asia Minor in the Hellenic state of the Sevres treaty. In this perspective, it was crucial to assess cultural differences between various Muslim groups in Asia Minor, in an attempt to detract from a monolithic Turkish identity and to reduce its appeal among them. The vision of the "civilising mission"

of the Greek state in Asia Minor stems from the perception of Hellenism as a westernisation agent in the "Orient", a strong component of the *Megali Idea*. Karavidas' and Malouchos' studies could then be regarded as a part of the social engineering entailed in this vision.

Reşat Kasaba describes the traditionally multicultural environment of Antakya. Attributed to the city's geographical position and its loose Ottoman administration, this multiethnic character, along with commercial prosperity, led to a specific sense of belonging among Antakya's inhabitants. Its multiethnic status, though challenged by national rivalries in the closing years of Ottoman rule, was maintained until the integration of Hatay sanjak into Turkey (1939). But Alevis and Arab Christians continued to constitute a considerable part of its population.

In her brilliant text, Ayşe Öncü sketches the multiple procedures through which Istanbul emerges not only as a national centre but also as an international metropolis by virtue of the Ottoman heritage it represents. The commercialisation of culture and history in the new liberal era has resulted in a change of collective attitudes towards the Ottoman past. The Turkish state, tycoons, municipal authorities and tourism industry present Turkey as an heir to a multicultural Ottoman legacy. Istanbul has obtained a privileged position in this endeavour. It has emerged as a locus where an idyllic image of the Ottoman past is projected – an image of tolerance and harmonic coexistence of various ethnoreligious groups. This narrative has also been inserted in the strategy of political parties such as the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi) or the AKP to create a distinct civic identity (*Istanbul-luluk*) and a new Islamic sense of belonging. It goes in tandem with the interventions by the state or market forces that have dramatically modified the city's landscape – something that has provoked new inclusions and exclusions.

Last but not least, this discourse has marginalised Ankara and counteracted the monophonic versions of history proposed by Turkish nationalism. In this respect it constitutes, I would add, an aspect of a new emerging Turkish identity.

So, though modernist geographies constitute an integral part of nation building in the Greek and Turkish cases – and not only – they always had to deal with the imperial past. Besides, they are made from the raw material offered by imperial spatial representations. This is what emerges throughout the volume, which is for this reason a valuable tool for the study of Greek and Turkish nationalisms.

NOTES

- 1 Faruk Birtek and Thalia Dragonas (eds), *Citizenship and the Nation-State in Greece and Turkey*, London/New York: Routledge, 2005 [in Greek: *Ελλάδα και Τουρκία: Πολίτης και έθνος-κράτος*, Athens: Alexandria, 2006]; Caglar Kayder and Anna Frangoudaki (eds), *Ways to Modernity in Greece and Turkey: Encounters with Europe, 1850–1950*, London/New York: Tauris, 2007 [in Greek: *Ελλάδα και Τουρκία. Πορείες εκσυγχρονισμού: Οι αμφίσημες σχέσεις τους με την Ευρώπη, 1850–1950*, Athens: Alexandria, 2008].