Ethnography and national priorities in the post-Ottoman context

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What is the relationship between essentialism and the modern state? A great number of thinkers have tried to persuade us that modern western states need clear cut categories in order to operate. Thus the population of the sate has to be clearly categorised (citizens, legal migrants, sans-papier, healthy and non healthy, able for military service – non able for military service, tax payers – non tax payers, employed – self employed, etc.). We have been told that modernity is all about well defined categories. Of course there are counter arguments to such views, arguments pointing out that 'we have never been modern'. My argument in this paper is that modern states may well operate by adopting non essentialist categorisations of their population. Actually this may well serve in a more productive way the needs of the state.

I am coming from a country which today may be called as the great neo-liberal experiment of destroying society in Europe (including the total demolition of academia). I could have made my point based on the present day situation. Instead I will focus on the same state, Greece in the early 20th century. This is, in a way, more interesting because it makes clear that modern western states may be in favour of non essentialist categorizations from the very beginning of their establishment.

I will also try to involve in the discussion the role of ethnographic knowledge. There is a popular representation of anthropology as opposing all versions of essentialism. I am personally very sceptical about such simplistic and politically correct views of anthropology and ethnography. Beyond any doubt ethnographic research is expected to offer non essentialist understandings of society which, by definition, contradicts with the nationalist views of the nation as culturally linguistically and religiously homogenous. The overcoming of essentialist perceptions of 'identities' implies a liberating role for ethnography. My aim in this paper is to present the ethnographic endeavors in the post-Balkan Wars Greece. In doing so I will demonstrate **how a critical to essentialism ethnography may actually serve the needs of the nation-state.** I will focus on the case of Kostantinos Karavidas ethnographic studies in 'Asia Minor' (the Villayet of Izmir), Greek Macedonia and Thrace (northern Greece).

The breakdown of the Ottoman Empire in the mid 1910s almost doubled the size of the Greek state. Areas of the

southern Balkans (Epirus, parts of Macedonia and Thrace) and part of the Asia Minor coast (the Smyrna/Izmir villayet) came under the control of Greek authorities. The population of these areas was perceived as 'racially mixed' and the task to administrate it became an issue of both national and international politics. The term 'racially mixed' was used with reference to the various Muslim populations (Turkish speaking, Slav speaking, Albanian speaking, Vlach speaking, Greek speaking), to the Slav speaking Orthodox Christians, to the Albanian speaking Orthodox Christians, the Jews (Ladino and Greek speaking), the Arabs, the Levantines, the Armenianas and the Roma. To a great extend, the mixture of populations was radically solved in the mid 1920s when the exchanges of populations between Greece, Turkey and Bulgaria strengthen the national homogeneity in these countries. However, during the 1914-1926 period the Greek state attempted to create an liberal institutional framework coping with the needs of its 'racially mixed' population.

Just after the Balkan Wars (1912-14) Greek academics and policy makers turned their attention to the problem of incorporating socially, culturally, politically and economically the former Ottoman territories into their nation state structures. During the 1914 – 1922 period (i.e. from the end of the Balkan Wars until the withdraw of the Greek Army from Smyrna) the annexation of the 'New Lands'[i] generated significant challenges and dilemmas for the state administration. The following analysis indicates that the religious, cultural and linguistic diversity of the populations living in these areas reinforced practices and attitudes which, on the one hand, were linked with the national policy of

Hellenization, and, on the other hand, refer to a colonial type of administration. The situation in the New Lands demanded the proper scientific study of these populations in order a) to ensure their integration into the Greek state, and b) to allow a more productive use of the resources of these areas. Part of this process involved the hybrid attempt to develop ethnological studies and the academic discipline of ethnology.

The study of otherness among Greek scholars was influenced by the establishment of the Greek Historical and Ethnological Society in 1882 which generated the discussion on the academic discipline of ethnology. In the first volume of the journal *Laographia* [Folklore] (1909) Nikolaos Politis, one of the founding fathers of Greek Folklore Studies, discussed in detail the similarities and differences between ethnology and folklore. He concluded that ethnology studies 'peoples living in a state of nature' while folklore studies focus on peoples 'sharing the same native land and its culture'. Thus a ranking was established in respect of the approach to otherness. Ethnology undertook the study of the most distant others while folklore studies remained focused on the Greeks.[ii]

It is certainly not accidental that among the first 4 Schools founded at the Greek University of Smyrna in 1921, there was a School of Ethnology of the Peoples of the Orient. Let me explain... Based on the Treaty of Neuilly which ended the Balkan Wars, the greatest part of what today is the Turkish coast at the Aegean Sea, was annexed by Greece. There was a great number of Orthodox Christians, most of them Greek speaking, living in this area. The majority of them identified themselves as

Greeks and that time. The Greek Army landed in Smyrna in 1919 and two years later the University of Smyrna was established by Kostantinos Karatheodori, a German trained mathematician and close friend of Albert Einstein. This was the second Greek University established, the first one was in Athens in 1843. Although the University of Smyrna never operated because the Greeks evacuated Asia Minor in September 1922, one needs to keep in mind that the Greek state authorities considered the development of Ethnological knowledge as vital for their interests.

What kind of knowledge was available to Greek policy makers, at the beginning of the 20th century, regarding the local populations, local cultures, local economies of the lands gained after the Balkans Wars and WWI? The knowledge available was provided by

(a) non academic accounts produced by military personnel, spies, merchants, local expatriates and diplomats.

(b) scholars with an academic background who traveled in these areas of the Orient (EXPLAIN ORIENT) (Abbot 1909, Brailsford 1906)

(c) academic researchers, mainly geographers (Kalfoglous 1898, Skalieris 1922, Kontoyiannis 1921) and demographers (Pallis 1920, Brancoff Dimitri Michef 1905)

All of the above mentioned may be called arm-chair geographers since none of them actually conducted an extended fieldwork survey to all the areas they describe in their works. [iii] Their studies mainly relied on data coming from secondary resources, from information provided by third parties[iv] and from selective research in specific areas. Thus, they failed to offer persuasive arguments to the non-Greek policy makers. This failure

obviously influenced the research methodology of Kostantinos Karavidas.

Karavidas first ethnographic experience took place in the villayet of Izmir in 1922. Instead of focusing on the large scale and relying on secondary data and information provided by others, Karavidas attempted fieldwork research on specific regions. His efforts resemble to the work of some British anthropologists who assisted the colonial administration of India in producing ethnological maps and censuses (Kuper 1983).

Let me provide you with some biographical information about K.K. Born in 1890 KK studied Law and Economics at the Un of Athens. As a student he became involved in a liberal and even leftist society called the students companion. He strongly opposed monarchy, he fought as a volunteer in the front line during the Balkan Wars, he joined Eleft. Venizelos close group of associates when Venizelos organized a coup against the Greek king in 1917. He served as a top consultant in the Greek administration of Macedonia and Thrace in the period between 1917-1921. In 1922 he went to Smyrna. After the evacuation of Greeks from Asia Minor and the compulsory exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey, KK worked as a consultant responsible for minority issues and rural development in northern Greece. He later joined the Agricultural Bank of Greece which was established according to his instructions. He drafted the first law on rural cooperatives in Greece. He was a communitarian opposing Marxist ideas but having good terms with socialist scholars of his era. At the age of 53 he organized a small resistance group during WWII. He died in 1973. He was fluent in French, he had extensively

studied writings on Human Geography (his favorite scholar was Vidal de la Blanche (Les conditions geographique des faits sociaux, 1902, Annales de Geographie). KK believed in the need of the nation. He felt Greek and fought for Greece. But he was a liberal patriot, he did not share the view that the nation has to be linguistically, culturally and even religiously homogenous.

Let me turn to his first 1922 ethnographic experience. Ntinos Malouchos, a close associate and, to some extent, the mentor of Kostantinos Karavidas, encouraged him to conduct ethnographic research in western and central Asia Minor. In the autumn and winter of 1922 Malouchos himself conducted an 'ethnographic mission' – as he calls it - to the interior of Asia Minor and submitted a memorandum to the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the title 'On the diversity of the Muslim population of Asia Minor and the economic relations among the various population elements'. In this report Malouchos refers in some detail to the languages spoken, the relations between 'races', the role of women, the customs and morals, the sense of national awareness. In conclusion, he advises Karavidas: 'I believe what would greatly interest the Foreign Ministry would be an ethnological study of the non-Turkish Muslims of Asia Minor and a study of the relations between them and the Turks'.

Karavidas was persuaded by Malouchos and in early May 1922 submitted an application to the Foreign Ministry seeking assistance to travel to Asia Minor in order 'to study the following question: What are the economic relations to the purely Turkish population of the other Muslim communities, which either belong to heretical sects or have different customs, manners and traditions,

leading to a lack of uniformity among them'. In order to persuade the Foreign Minister of the necessity of the study, Karavidas observes in his application that:

> 'it is likely that these small differences, properly defined and developed, will provide a broad base for the cultivation of a national awareness; it is not impossible that a special policy might be based on this by the state in Asia Minor as it seeks to weaken and fragment the strength of the Turks'.

A few days later, on 9 May 1922, Karavidas submitted another memorandum in support of his application, titled a 'Note on the economic relations among the Muslim communities in Asia Minor'. This four-page, handwritten document was probably the result of correspondence between Karavidas and Malouchos at an earlier date. Karavidas formulates the basic working hypotheses of the ethnographic research he wishes to carry out in Asia Minor. He observes a 'diversity in the manners and customs of the Muslim population', analyzes the relationships between the Turkish landowners and the other Muslims and concludes: 'the following question remains to be explored: has there been intermarriage between these villages or has each remained pure, inhabited by only one race'. In further support of his request for assistance in his research to Asia Minor, he observes once again that 'this new awareness may evolve further, which would, in immediate and practical terms, divide the villages of those forced to embrace Islam from those which were always Turkish'.

This emphasis on distinguishing between the different identities of the Muslims of Asia Minor and the possibility of creating new awareness of non-Turkish roots, on the one hand mirrors a social reality, while

reflecting the deepest wishes of the Greek authorities at that time (Stamatopoulos, Anagnostopoulou 1997). There is no doubt that the Muslim population of Asia Minor could be divided into different groups and categories according to descent, language, religious particularities and socio-economic conditions.[v] A number of these differences had been politicized, a fact which explains the alliance of some Circassian chieftains with the Greek army against Kemal Ataturk.

On 27 May 1922 Karavidas was granted permission to travel to Smyrna in the capacity of a journalist. He traveled to the interior, sending a few reports to Athenian newspapers and, basically, occupying himself with the writing of his study. As part of his field research Karavidas conducted a census of the villages of the province of Pergamon in July 1922; these villages belonged to the santzak of the sarouhan of the villayet of Izmir (or Aydun). This area was, of course, a safe choice in that it was located close to Smyrna and inhabited by many Greek-speaking Orthodox Christian populations (Augustinos 1992). In a letter to Malouchos dated 28 July 1922 he divides the populations of the district into Greeks, Armenians, Jews and Muslims. The Muslims are sub-divided into Turks, Circassians, Tachtatzides, Bosnians, and Turko-Cretans. He finally produced a 63 pages paper titled 'Observations on the nature and future usefulness of the historical community organizations, and on the future policy of guidance of the Greek communities in Ionia'. The paper contains a hand-drawn ethnographic map showing the Greek communities of the western and central part of Asia Minor.

In 1924 – 1925 he was appointed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in N and W Greek Macedonia to conduct ethnographic research among minority populations (Slavs, Vlachs). He produced 7 reports, he supervised the migration of Slav families, he worked on the history of Macedonian Muslims. In his reports he stressed the importance of Greek settlements in N and W Greek Macedonia. He was against harsh and violent policies towards minorities. He argued against essentialist distinctions between Greeks, Macedonians and Vlachs, between Muslims and Christians. He actually argued that the state may capitalize upon these multiple and often mixed identities. Between August 1926 and December 1929 KK expanded his ethnographic research by studying zadrugas in Florina, Vlach and Sarakatsan nomads in Greece and southern Bulgaria, crossborder entrepreneurs in the Greek Turkish frontiers. He paid particular attention in local economies and kinship structures, gender roles in rural societies, local elites, patronage and the role of the state. Although not trained as an ethnographer he kept excellent fieldnotes, detailed personal diaries, copies of his correspondence with officials, photographs, ethnographic maps and censuses.

Not all of K's suggestions written in his reports were adopted by state policy makers. In many aspects, K. was too radical for the state to apply his policy suggestions. However, the state funded his work, employed him as a top rank public employee and adopted some of his policy recommendations based on his ethnographic work.

To conclude, the activities of KK and others (I have only mentioned Malouchos in this papers, but there are a few others) indicate that modern western states may be in

favour of non essentialist categorizations from the very beginning of their establishment. In addition, a **critical to essentialism ethnography may actually serve the needs of the states**.

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Notes

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[i] The term 'New Lands' (*Nees Chores*) is a native one, used to refer to the former Ottoman regions (Macedonia, Thrace, Epirus and the Villayet of Izmir) annexed by the Greek administration according to the Treaties of Neuilly (1919) and Serves (1920).

[ii] See Loukatos 1968, Kyriakidou-Nestoros 1978, Megas 1967, Meraklis 1971 for a detailed discussion on Greek folklore studies.

[iii] Compared to the writings of Kontoyiannis and Skalieris, the work olf Kalfoglous is less influenced by a nationalist agenda. Kalfoglous belongs to the tradition of nineteenth century geographers (see Anestidis 2002).

[iv] Such data were often provided by the Athens based Society for Greek Letters or the numerous Greek Societies of the various Ottoman cities.

[v] This was also the case for the Greek Orthodox Christian populations of the region.