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HISTORY AND ETHNICITY IN ANATOLIA
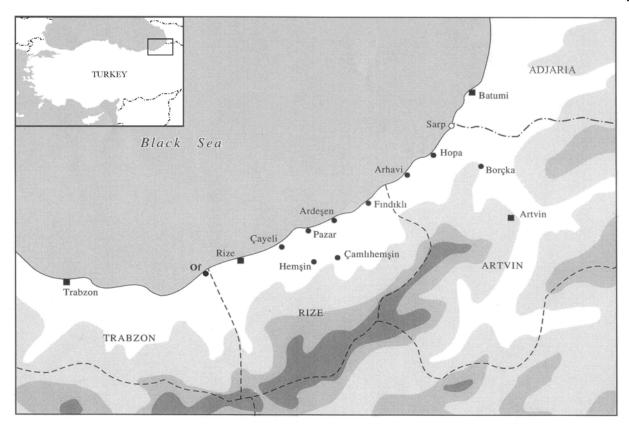
History and Ethnicity in Anatolia

Chris Hann[1]

Abstract

This paper begins by sketching a simplified intellectual context for the author's recent monographic study of a region in north-east Turkey (Bellér-Hann and Hann 2000). The scope is then gradually widened. First, it is shown how more historically oriented research can provide insight into the social organization of the region in question, and in particular, into the nature of ethnic identity. Contrary to some common assumptions, ethnicity seems to have been de-emphasized in the later Ottoman period, when the people of this periphery were already well integrated into the state system. Second, again drawing on recent publications by other scholars, the paper reviews the question of ethnicity in Anatolia generally. The Turkish republic has often been criticized for its failure to recognize ethnic groups, and is likely to come under increasing pressure to recognize the rights of 'cultural minorities', e.g. in negotiations over EU entry. Within anthropology, however, there is no consensus as to how recognition of group diversity should be translated into political practice. Key terms such as 'culture' and 'ethnicity' have become unstable. According to Barth's influential discussion (1969), ethnicity classifies a person 'in terms of his basic, most general identity'. But in north-east Turkey, it can be argued that this dominant identity has long been given by the Turkish republican state and its Ottoman predecessor. The people who live here may have been ethnic groups in the classical Barthian sense at some point in the distant past, but ethnicity does not seem to have been a basic principle in social interaction since the seventeenth century. To force them into the 'ethnic group' container now would be a greater rupture than the replacement of Ottoman diversity by the Kemalist unitary state.

I

The relation between anthropology and history has been problematic in the modern British school. Even after they began cautiously to recognize the desirability of building a historical dimension into their fieldwork-based case studies, most anthropologists were either not qualified, or simply too lazy, to do the necessary historical work. To illustrate this inadequacy (and with the kind permission of co-researcher and co-author Ildikó Bellér-Hann) I shall give the example of our recently published *Turkish Region* (2000). After exposing the limitations of the largely synchronic account given in *Turkish Region*, based on ethnographic fieldwork in the province of Rize between 1983 and 1999, I shall turn to a more recent anthropological contribution, Michael Meeker's *Nation of Empire*, published in 2002, to show how anthropology and history can be fruitfully combined. Meeker's book deals with an adjacent district of the Black Sea coast, the town and rural hinterland of Of, between the larger centres of Rize and Trabzon (see map on following page). I shall pay special attention to what he has to say about ethnicity, the second term in my title. This is not because ethnicity is the main theme of *Nation of Empire*, any more than it is the main theme of *Turkish Region*. But it is currently an exciting topic of discussion in Turkey, especially among intellectuals in the major cities. It is also of major concern to many external groups, including highly organized ethno-nationalist diaspora communities and western European politicians and administrators weighing up whether or not Turkey is ready to be admitted to the European Union. I shall consider Peter Alford Andrews' recent *Supplement* to his monumental *Ethnic Groups in the Republic of Turkey* (1989, 2002) and, following the definition of ethnicity presented by Andrews, take a fresh look at the model offered by Fredrik Barth in his seminal text of 1969 (1998).

Northeast Turkey and Adjaria

II

Let me begin by placing *Turkish Region* in an intellectual context, and giving a brief indication of its contents. My wife and I first stayed in the Rize region for four months in 1983. We revisited in 1988, then made a longer stay in 1992-3, and finally a brief fieldtrip in 1999. Our interests and skills were happily complementary. I had the stronger background in anthropology, and a bias towards issues of political economy; the work in the 1980s was mainly focused on social consequences of the introduction of tea, which became a dominant cash crop in this region after 1950. My wife is the stronger linguist and, in addition to a special interest in matters concerning women, she has published separately on local constructions of the past, and on the impact of foreign 'trader tourists' in the 1990s. *Turkish Region* is the major joint publication deriving from our fieldwork.

Our main intellectual debts are, as we say in the Preface, to two recently deceased and much missed 'giants of British social anthropology', Paul Stirling and Ernest Gellner, both of whom we knew well personally. Paul Stirling was the pioneer of anthropological fieldwork in Turkey, beginning his study of two communities near Kayseri in 1949, as a student of Evans-Pritchard in

Oxford. Among his major publications are the monographs *Turkish Village* (1965) and the valuable article 'Cause, Knowledge and Change: Turkish Village revisited' from 1974. In his later years Stirling did much to encourage the use of computers in anthropology; a great deal of his work, including diaries and other unpublished field data, can be consulted at the website of the Department which he established at the University of Kent (http://lucy.ukc.ac.uk/Stirling/index.html).

Ernest Gellner did not work on Turkey and is better known for his contributions to the theory and philosophy of anthropology than for his own fieldwork in Morocco (which was partly supervised by Stirling). Gellner was nonetheless always fascinated by modern Turkey, offering the emergence of the unitary Kemalist state in place of the diversity of the Ottoman Empire as an exemplary illustration of the evolutionary shift from agrarian civilizations to modern states based on industry, a standardized 'high culture', based on mass literacy in a single dominant language. The model is best outlined in his *Nations and Nationalism* (1983). Gellner also published extensively on Islam and what he saw as particular 'puritan' characteristics that endowed it with advantages over other world religions in modern social conditions (where 'each man is his own clerk'). He did not apply these arguments in any detail to the Turkish case, though both he and Stirling would undoubtedly have been fascinated by the fluctuating fortunes of 'politicized Islam' in Turkey in recent years.

Neither Stirling nor Gellner is a fashionable figure among contemporary anthropologists. The main criticisms run as follows. In the case of Stirling, though much of his detailed ethnographic work is still used and admired (e.g. concerning the village as a community, the negotiation of marriages, labour migration etc.), there are at least two major gaps. The first is religion, the second is history. Stirling made little effort to investigate the past of the communities he studied, neither attempting archival work, nor taking much trouble to collect life-histories from the villagers, many of whom, at the time of the original fieldwork would presumably have been able to give him valuable insights into the late Ottoman period and the early impact of Kemalism. This defect can hardly be laid at the door of Stirling alone. It was characteristic of the generation of anthropologists shaped decisively by Malinowski in the inter-war decades that they offered detailed accounts of how societies functioned in the present, i.e. at the time of the fieldwork. This synchronic 'functionalism', as Malinowski labelled his theoretical perspective, was a reaction against the 'conjectural history' that underpinned so much nineteenth century anthropology. Indeed, for 'tribal' societies that lacked any historical sources, this was no doubt good advice to give to anthropologists in the late colonial period, and it was highly productive. In the second half

of the twentieth century, however, the inadequacies of a purely synchronic, 'snapshot' approach, were increasingly recognized; and not only for regions such as Anatolia, where a relative abundance of historical sources was potentially available.

Ernest Gellner was greatly attracted by Malinowski's functionalism, and never tempted by archival work. He differed from most of his contemporaries in Britain by insisting that the detailed ethnography of a community be reworked into structural models, some of which might indeed be applied to long-term historical evolution (as with his application of Ibn Khaldun's 'pendulum swing' theory of town-tribe interaction in the Islamic world). Gellner's best known model is the one noted already, of the modern nation-state. But it is also a model that has attracted much criticism: for the alleged circularity of the 'functional' link he posits between industrialism and the nation-state, or alternatively, for pinning too much weight on industrialization as a prime cause of nationalism, and for paying too little attention to other uneven dimensions of modernization, and thereby exaggerating the 'block-like' character of the new form of society.

These criticisms of Stirling and Gellner are easy enough to substantiate, and some of them can be readily applied to *Turkish Region*. We build on some of Stirling's ethnography, but like him we spent little time in the archives (though we did try harder than he did to do justice to religion). Our debt to Gellner is a more complex matter. We return to his model repeatedly, noting some instances where it seems to fail, such as the persistence of minority languages. On the whole, however, we find this 'ideal type' not merely good to think with, but a rather close empirical approximation to the incorporation of the Rize region into a new type of national society. We trace this both in 'objective' ways, e.g. by noting improved communications and social mobility, the prosperity brought by tea etc., and in more 'subjective' ways, suggesting that the inhabitants of this geographically remote region have come to think of themselves as 'fully paid up members' of this new national entity.

This framework is sketched in the Introduction to our book, which also provides an overview of the region's geography and a very brief review of its recorded history, for which we depend heavily on the published work of Anthony Bryer and David Winfield (1985). The bulk of our book is then organized around a notion of 'social identity', which we use in a deliberately loose sense, to allow us to touch on many quite separate dimensions of social life that seem to matter to local people. We begin with an account of the state and the experience of its activities at regional and local levels, including the initiation of the tea industry, new systems of administration, education, and of course the active inculcation of nationalist ideology. In this regard we discuss

nationalist distortions of the history of the region, such as the arguments of the historian Fahrettin Kırzıoğlu that all the peoples of the East Black Sea region were of Turkic ethnic origin, though some of them had regrettably lost their pristine language in the course of time. We then look at the complementary force of 'market', which has gained strength and visibility in recent decades, not only in the tea sector but also, as a result of the opening of the state border to Georgia and the subsequent disintegration of the Soviet Union, in the proliferation of informal trade throughout the region. This is followed by a chapter on 'civil society', not surprisingly one of the shorter chapters in the book, since it takes off from a 'western' definition in terms of 'intermediate' organizations, associations, clubs etc. This sort of civic culture is poorly developed, but if one widens the criteria to include 'male café society', then there is, after all, a lot going on in this intermediate realm between the institutions of the state and the private sphere of the family.

It is nonetheless this private sphere that comes first for most human beings, and we explore gender relations and changes in marriage and wedding customs in two detailed ethnographic chapters. We show, for example, the failure of the Kemalist state to bring any significant changes to the region's high rate of first cousin marriage. The following chapter, the longest in the book, is devoted to another 'failure': in this region, as elsewhere in Turkey, many people reject the official republican dogma of laicism. On the one hand, modern forms of political Islam and even 'fundamentalist' trends are observable, while on the other, a traditional world of superstition and 'popular Islam' is very far from extinguished. This is followed by a chapter on 'ethnicity'. This chapter is again rather short, because we did not find this to be a major source of identity for very many inhabitants of the region. Finally, a short conclusion tries to show how the 'ordinary people' of the region creatively draw on all these sources of identity in their everyday lives, and calls into theoretical question the concept of culture; we argue against those who equate 'culture' with a nation or ethnic group, and also against those in our own discipline who have used 'culture' to argue for a single overarching idea or cosmology, the dominant frame or filter, through which all social phenomena are interpreted. We posit, instead, for this case, a more complex world of ideas and often contrary material realities, in which individual persons do their best to 'muddle through'.

III

To summarize the argument so far: *Turkish Region*, written in the academic tradition of Paul Stirling and Ernest Gellner, pays rather little attention to the traditions of the people who are its

subject. My wife and I made little attempt to investigate the history of the population of the east Black Sea region. The presentist bias of the discipline of anthropology in the generation after Malinowski 'fitted' well with the radical secularist, modernist ethos of the Kemalist state. The ideology of this state asserted a radical break with the Ottoman past. The people of the Rize region were exposed to this ideology, and they were also exemplary beneficiaries of this modernizing state's economic development policies through the investments in the tea industry. No wonder, then, that the people themselves seemed to reinforce the presentism of the ethnographers: they couldn't tell us much about their history, and we didn't press them; and anyway, they didn't seem to care very much about it.

As far as ethnicity is concerned, we documented the presence of four groups in the region of our study: in ascending order of size, Georgians, Hemşinli, Lazi and 'unmarked Turks'. I say 'unmarked' for this fourth category because members of each of the other three could - and often did - also argue that they were 'Turks' and not just in the sense that they were citizens of the Turkish Republic. In some more for-reaching sense, the Kemalist Republic had persuaded even those who acknowledged another 'ethnic' label, including many with knowledge of a non-Turkish language, that they were nonetheless in some deeper sense of Turkish identity. This corresponded well with Gellner's model of the homogenizing national identity of the modern industrial state, which obliterates the ethnic diversity that is characteristic of agrarian empires such as that of the Ottomans.

Gellner's model of the pre-modern condition does not question the existence of the ethnic groups as such. People have always lived in groups, he insists, implicitly equating these with (ethnic) 'cultures', while pointing out that religion was the main principal behind the *millet* system, the distinctive Ottoman method for organizing agrarian diversity. But did the speakers of Kartvelian, Armenian and Greek languages in the Ottoman period have any sense at all of constituting an ethnic group, as we use this concept today? Was ethnicity a key principle of social organization in the (non-culturalist) sense elaborated by Barth (1998)? To answer such questions it is necessary to move beyond the fieldwork methods of the ethnographer and adopt the methods of the historian. This is precisely the move made by Michael Meeker, whose recent book *Nation of Empire* is an excellent example of how the two disciplines can cross-fertilize.

Meeker began his fieldwork in 1965, when he paid his first visit to the district of Of. Located on the western boundary of our 'Turkish Region', it has been more directly influenced over the centuries by neighbouring Trabzon. Although this district, too, became predominantly Muslim in the late sixteenth century, substantial numbers of Greek speakers and an uncertain number of

'crypto Christians' persisted well into the republican period (the great majority were 'exchanged' and obliged to move to Greece following the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, which took religion as the basis for deportation). Meeker's dissertation (University of Chicago, 1970) was an elegant treatise on honour, family and descent, based on his ethnographic materials. It seems to have left him unsatisfied. In later decades he turned increasingly to historical materials – published work by local historians and foreign scholars, but also Ottoman and foreign consular archival sources – in order to understand better what he had already documented as a presentist ethnographer.

As far as ethnicity was concerned, Meeker, too, found that it was downplayed, that the speakers of different languages had no interest in consolidating a distinctive ethnic identity. He probed further by investigating foreign observers' reports on conflicts characteristic of the region in the early nineteenth century. The result: "A thorough reading of the reports of British and French consuls together with a view of the reports of European travelers at the time provides no indication whatsoever of an ethnic basis for this hostility" (1996: 58). Instead of assuming that the 'natural' units of conflict in agrarian society were groups distinguished by language, religion and other 'cultural' characteristics, in other words the precursors of today's ethnic groups, one needs to look more carefully at regional political and administrative history over a long historical period. The downplaying of ethnicity is a consequence of "the Ottomanization of local political culture" (1996: 45). Meeker's book attempts to trace this history as far back as possible.

Of course, the sources are inadequate for the task. Meeker endorses the doyen of Pontic scholars Anthony Bryer: "The ethnic origins of the eastern Pontic peoples (18 are listed in an unofficial census of 1911) are probably past disentangling" (1969: 193; cited in Meeker 2002: 93). Nonetheless, drawing on the work of a local historian, Meeker suggests that there may be some truth in the nationalist historiography after all: some early Turkoman immigrants to the region may have "assimilated themselves to the existing inhabitants, losing their language and their religion, only to get them back centuries later" (2002: 91). This is close to the category of 'conjectural history', of which Malinowski disapproved. But, rather than pursue the concern with ethnic origins, Meeker supplements his scant documentary sources with plausible inferences from the region's distinctive geography to sketch how the 'imperial project' of the Ottomans took local root. It was their ties to wider social systems, first Constantinople, then the Pontic Empire of Trabzon, then again Istanbul after its conquest in 1453, which allowed these hillbillies on the periphery to transcend their distinct ethnic origins. As soldiers and preachers, the inhabitants of Of partook in the work of the empire, as did later generations of labour migrants in the republican period. In the earlier centuries, as Ottoman central government began to disintegrate, the

structures which held the local society together, were modelled continuously on those of the centre. Thus the *bey* in his *konak* was culturally imitating the *padişah* in his *saray*; this Ottoman political culture eventually overcame all the linguistic, religious and 'ethnic' diversity of the region. Moreover, the incorporation of this peripheral region into the wider state system was not just a one-way process, the 'Ottomanization of Trabzonlus', as Meeker terms it. In one of his more speculative suggestions, he first links the extreme concern with male 'honour' to the ecological conditions of the region (the flexible horticulture which did not require continuous male labour inputs), and then suggests that the people of this region "transmitted the moralization of gender relations to other parts of Anatolia. (…) Ottomanization of Trabzonlus led inexorably to Trabzonization of the Ottomans" (2002: 106-7).

One does not need to accept every idea in this immensely stimulating book in order to recognize the value of its original perspective. Contrary to most Ottoman historians, who consider places like the east Black Sea coast to be a social and political as well as a geographical periphery, Meeker shows how "a population of gardeners residing in remote mountain hamlets (found) themselves a place in the imperial system" (2002: 110). Contrary to Ernest Gellner, who takes Kemalist ideology at face value and assumes that integration into a larger state system was a twentieth century achievement, Meeker shows that many important elements of this system were put in place by Ottoman modernization. Contrary to Bernard Lewis, whose classic account of *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (1961) portrays the Republic as the product of Turkish and Islamic 'streams of influence', but overlooks the institutional legacy of the Ottoman Empire, Meeker shows that a key Gellnerian point, that nations are the *product* rather than the *cause* of the modern state, can be applied to the Ottoman Empire itself. Modernity in his sense does not originate with the republic. Rather, its origins can be dated back at least to the seventeenth century. Throughout the period of imperial decline, elite 'oligarchies' dominated their regions, while at the same time they formed the lowest rung of the state system itself. They persisted in the transition from the 'post-classical imperial system' to the 'Westernized imperial system' of the *Tanzimat* period and, after only a brief eclipse, they emerged unscathed to flourish in the local institutions of the Kemalist Republic once this had opened up to multiparty competition after the Second World War. Meeker finds the same elite families asserting their domination of a district, even in quite novel institutions such as the cooperatives set up to provide fertilizer to growers of tea, the region's new cash crop in the 1950s.

Of course there was radical change under Atatürk (or rather, as far as most villagers were concerned, in the generation after his death, when his reforms filtered through to all levels of

society; see Stirling 1974). But, even if people themselves emphasize that moment of rupture, the historical anthropologist is able to show significant continuities over many centuries. Why does this matter? After all, many 'presentist' anthropologists would be content with laying out the history of their subjects insofar as it matters to the people themselves. Although he draws on the work of some local historians (deconstructing some of their narratives to expose their Kemalist frame), Meeker nowhere claims that his dogged pursuit of the Ottoman legacy is a major local concern. Yet his historical turn has more than a purely scholarly justification. Many issues that are of tremendous contemporary significance to many Turks, in the east Black Sea region and elsewhere, can be better understood when we recognize the impact of Ottoman modernity. My principal example in this lecture is the nature of ethnic identity, but Meeker's work has implications for a great deal more: for relations between Islam and the state, between different levels of the state apparatus, between town and countryside, even between men and women. For all these reasons, this original panorama of the *longue durée* deserves to find a wide readership.

IV

Meeker worked in the district immediately adjacent to our *Turkish Region*, to the west. At this point I want briefly to introduce another anthropologist, who has studied the adjacent region to the east, i.e. the former Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of Adjaria. Mathijs Pelkmans has recently completed his PhD. dissertation in anthropology at the University of Amsterdam, and the work I wish to discuss is not yet published. He has worked in various parts of the region, including its capital Batumi. Pelkmans (forthcoming) has also written some fascinating articles on the border Lazi community of Sarp, where since 1922 a small stream, which previously divided one community, has been an inter-state boundary. He was particularly successful in collecting oral histories, to recover a long record of deportations and other traumatic experiences.

  Like Michael Meeker, Mathijs Pelkmans was not content with presentism and the conventional community fans of the ethnographer, even when supplemented by oral history. He wanted to understand how the people of Adjaria (a regional designation) felt about their identities in the late Ottoman period. Following the Russian-Turkish wars, large numbers of Muslim Georgian speakers, previously subjects of the Ottoman Sultan, became subjects of the Romanov Tsar. It was a surprise and a shock to the Georgian nationalists of this period to discover that speakers of Kartvelian languages, rather than identify themselves as Georgian, preferred to flee in large numbers to remote parts of Anatolia, where they could continue to enjoy the security of Ottoman

rule. Many of these communities still exist today, though many of these Muslims later returned to their homeland when the Tsarist regime offered concessions (basically, guaranteed recognition of religious difference).

In the Soviet period, a crucial early decision was the decree of 1921 creating an autonomous Adjarian Republic within Georgia. The circumstances are not entirely clear, but the decision was enforced by Stalin personally. The implementation of Stalin's nationality principles brought recognition to many groups, including the Soviet Lazi, but this often proved to be short-lived. Both Lazi and the new Adjarian identity were soon repressed. The Muslim population of this corner of the Republic was left with no choice, but to declare themselves as Georgian by nationality (ethnicity). Curiously, Adjaria retained its administrative autonomy, though few natives of the region attained the top jobs in the capital Batumi. Georgian domination for the rest of the socialist period might have been expected to lead to a reaction in the postsocialist years, but in fact Adjaria has remained peaceful. Pelkmans (2003) shows that this cannot be attributed to a 'primordial' sense of shared identity; after all, in the late nineteenth century the link to Georgia was barely acknowledged. Rather, he explains this outcome primarily with reference to the weakening of Islam, which under socialism became effectively confined to the private sphere. This atrophy in turn has its roots in the nature of Islamization in the Ottoman period, which was mainstream Sunni, the faith maintaining a strong presence in the public sphere. Unlike neighbouring parts of the Caucasus, where Islam is a potent political force today, religious brotherhoods were never important in this region.

Adjarian identity today is primarily regional. It is a unique case in the former Soviet Union: the only autonomous republic, based primarily on religious difference, which has not gravitated into conflict with the Republican capital, i.e. Tbilisi. As the Gellnerian model predicts, the homogenizing pressures in this state are strong. Mingrelian and Lazi linguistic minorities have no official recognition, though the language of the latter is not even mutually intelligible with Georgian. The Muslims of Adjaria have been coming under pressure to 'rejoin' the original Orthodox Christian Church of their ancestors, a church which aspires to be a monopolistic 'state church' (Pelkmans 2003). This case also suggests therefore, that while it may be possible to legislate new identity options in a unique historical conjuncture, such identities are likely to remain fragile, and fade when political circumstances change, if neither language nor religion is available to provide an effective basis for the assertion of difference.

V

This part of Georgia used to belong to the Ottoman Empire and must have shared at least some elements of 'Ottoman political culture' with the neighbouring districts of the east Black Sea coast studied by Michael Meeker. However, it would seem that there was less continuity of political and cultural forms east of Sarp and Batumi, at least after the Russian conquest. Where the Kemalist Republic continued the pattern of the Ottoman centuries by downplaying ethnicity, the new Soviet Union began by celebrating ethnic differences and contributed very directly to the shaping of durable new identities by making 'nationality' an integral feature of the new administrative-political system. These guys took their ethnicity seriously: it is rather as if the early Kemalists, instead of creating provinces called Rize and Artvin, each containing several distinct ethno-linguistic groups, had instead adapted the old Ottoman sub-province name of Lazistan, but, unlike the Ottomans, insisted that the administrative boundaries be tied to the linguistic boundaries.

Yet the case of Soviet Adjaria is an unusual one, since the creation of this autonomous republic had no clearly formed 'titular nationality'. This came about thanks to a particular conjuncture of religious and political circumstances. This case highlights the 'contingency' of ethnicity. It shows how ethnicity can be emphasized or de-emphasized according to historical circumstances. In the Soviet terminology the key term is *nationalnost*; this reminds us that, in this field, the words themselves are also unstable and contingent; our concept of 'ethnicity' is historically specific, and the preoccupation with this form of identity, closely linked of course to the study of nationalism, is still a fairly new development in the social sciences. The disintegration of federal socialist states has contributed to the greater salience of ethnicity in the contemporary world. This renewed strong interest in ethnic distinctiveness in states which had, apparently, for decades been following the path of homogenizing modernization, arguably draws attention to fundamental shortcomings in the ideal type of Ernest Gellner.

Turkey, of course, has not been immune to these general tendencies. Twenty years ago, when my wife and I were just beginning our project in Rize, the term *etnik* was familiar perhaps only to a handful of intellectuals. *Etnik grubu* may still not be all that widely disseminated, but searching questions about collective identity have been posed in many parts of the country. The 'Kurdish question' is of course the one that has attracted most attention – and also the most violence – both inside and outside the country. But there is a hardly less contentious 'Alevi Question' – arguably not the same thing at all, though, to some group members, the sense of being excluded from / by

the mainstream may be comparable. These 'major' identities may intersect and spawn new groups. The 'constructed' nature of ethnic identity has perhaps been illustrated most visibly in recent years by the emergence of a distinct *Zaza* group, highly contingent on the consciousness-raising and creative inputs of diaspora intellectuals in Germany (Kehl-Bodrogi 1998; Paul 2002). In the case of the Lazi, the principal agent of the campaign to persuade these people that they form an ethnic group, an 'endangered people' whose legitimate demands for cultural autonomy should be addressed urgently, is the German scholar, Wolfgang Feuerstein (see Feuerstein 1984; Bellér-Hann and Hann 2001: chapter 8).

Ethnicity is, then, flexible, contingent, constructed, not at all the essential, primordial identity that the activists make it out to be. The leading theoretician in this field in recent times has been Fredrik Barth, who approached ethnicity as a matter of the "social organization of cultural difference". According to Barth, when it is working effectively, it provides the individual with his or her "basic, most general identity" (1998: 13). But how far can this influential understanding be applied to Turkey today? My wife and I argue in our book, based on fieldwork completed in 1999, though the main period of data collection was 1992-3, that the people of this region draw deep, 'basic' senses of identity from a variety of sources, including their families, hamlets and market centres, and their religion. Barth is, of course, more interested in social interaction than in the subjectively experienced dimension of identity, but we found that ethnic identity as Lazi or Hemşinli was of very minor significance in the social life of this region. An ethnic identity is not inherently more important for social organization than a regional or local geographical affiliation. Should villagers in the district (*ilçe*) of Hemşin be able to claim a special ethnic identity as Hemşinli, while their neighbours over the mountains in the *ilçe* of Çayeli must accept that to be Çayelili is merely a local variant of Turkish ethnicity? Does Çayeli have an 'ethnic' boundary to the east but only a 'district' boundary to the west, because the population in the western half of Rize county is overwhelmingly 'unmarked Turk'? Marriage patterns, so far as we could investigate them, provide no supporting evidence: intermarriage has increased as communications have improved, but it is not new. We knew Lazi families in Fındıklı who used a go-between (*görücü*) to negotiate brides from Çayeli (see map on p. 3). Ethnicity plays virtually no role in social contact in the towns and on the marketplaces. There are few significant 'cultural' differences between any of these *ilçeler* today, apart from the persistence of Lazuri east of Pazar. Among Hemşinli, there is only the vague awareness that their ancestors probably spoke a different language until about 200 years ago, and they tend to be very cross if they are, for this reason, considered today to be close relatives of Armenians.

We did not rule out the possibility that a new generation of cultural activists might change this situation. Wolfgang Feuerstein might challenge this diagnosis or argue that, to the extent that our account of low ethnic consciousness was empirically valid, it should be attributed to generations of Kemalist repression; but this view is not borne out by Meeker's historical study. Another German-based scholar who has worked on ethnic minorities in Anatolia for many years is Peter Alford Andrews. His major publication *Ethnic Groups in the Republic of Turkey* (1989, reissued in 2002) is a meticulous documentation of the distribution of 47 ethnic minorities, based mostly on data collected privately by foreigners in the 1960s. The recent *Supplement* (2002) follows the same pattern, though this time the data have largely been supplied by 'insiders'. Like the earlier volume, the new one also includes commissioned essays on particular groups and topics. Both volumes have been prepared in close cooperation with the independent scholar Rüdiger Benninghaus, who contributed an essay on the Lazi to the 1989 volume. Benninghaus argues, as we do, that Lazi see no contradiction between their identity as Lazi and as Turks.

Andrews calls for a very flexible approach to ethnicity. He begins his discussion by suggesting that it is not the same as nationality, and that ethnic groups are "generally endogamous groups, whose criteria for cultural self-definition are common traditions selected from the past" (1989: 17-8). He regrets that the absence of detailed anthropological research makes it impossible in many cases to provide the 'emic' understanding of the group's identity. This is a different approach from that of Barth, who is concerned with the mutual attribution of ethnic identities rather than their internal self-understanding, though in actual fact much of Andrews' catalogue is compiled exactly as Barth would wish, according to 'self-ascription and ascription by others'. Andrews is aware of the dangers of ethnic cartography, since "boundaries are fluid, situational, and the criteria constantly shifting so that overall consistency is unattainable" (2002: 9). He notes that the book was commonly received in Turkey with the 'mosaic' metaphor: 'Turkey is a mosaic' (*Türkiye bir mozaiktir*). He comments: "The mosaic theory may be outmoded, so far as ethnologists are concerned (and I had *not* used the term myself), but the acceptance of this idea represents a distinct advance for the Turkish intelligentsia, until now, in my experience, the most reluctant to acknowledge the plurality of their state" (2002: 11). There is something troubling in this formulation, in which Turkish intellectuals are praised for progressing to a position from which their western counterparts have already moved on. The problem would seem to be how to 'acknowledge (…) plurality', without necessarily implying a world of bounded ethnicities, entirely remote from both Ottoman and Kemalist realities. Andrews, for the first time, cites the Barthian approach to ethnicity as 'a structuring of interaction'. He concludes, also citing

formulations of his Cologne colleague E. Orywal, that "Ethnicity is indeed the process of reciprocal identification: this must inevitably be the key to the situation in Turkey, with ethnea embedded in the matrix of the majority" (2002: 13).

The question remains: what exactly *are* these *ethnea*? What do 'the Lazi' have in common with 'the Mhallami' (examined in Andrew's latest volume by Benninghaus), with Turkish Alevis (discussed by David Shankland), or with Zazaki speaking Kurds (discussed by Ludwig Paul)? This is by no means merely a question of scholarly curiosity, only of interest to anthropologists. With the question of collective identity becoming of increasing interest to many people in Turkey, the consequences of insisting on the 'ethnic group' paradigm are potentially alarming. Turkish Alevis, for example, might use the term in connection with groups such as the Lazi, but think it totally inappropriate to their own case. Ethnicization could lead to practical problems for associations (*dernekler*) in major cities like Ankara and Istanbul, currently open to all migrants from the same *ilçe*. In the case of mixed *ilçeler* such as Pazar and Fındıklı, should they have to split, with members going in different directions according to their genealogies as Lazi or Hemşinli? What will happen to the huge numbers of descendants of mixed couples, if the social scene is ethnicized in this way?

It may already be happening. Contrary to some stereotypes held in Western Europe, contemporary Turkey appears to offer relatively conducive conditions for ethnic identity construction and many intellectuals are shaping these discussions through their activities and publications. For example, there are now quite a few publications celebrating the qualities of the Lazi language (*Lazuri*), especially the folk poetry, and also the music. Despite these trends, at least as of 1999 I would still maintain that the classic Gellnerian model (1983) has considerable explanatory power for the north-east. The population of this region has been very effectively integrated into their nation-state, and the new national identity is dominant. Thanks to Michael Meeker, we have seen that the foundations of this integration were established in the Ottoman period. Bellér-Hann and Hann (2000) do not claim that the Gellnerian model has the same explanatory power throughout the country. On the contrary, Gellner's own materialist assumptions would lead him to expect different outcomes, and less cultural standardization, where population sizes are larger and economic development less successful. These are empirical questions, for further investigation. The Gellnerian model need not be rejected entirely as a device to think with, simply because some groups have held on to ethnic or tribal identities more tenaciously than others. This would be the opposite bias to that which Peter Andrews has experienced in reviews of his work by the reactionary Kemalist establishment. Just because *some*

groups in some parts of Turkey, and outside in the diaspora, are currently engaged in anguished debates about collective identity, this should not lead to the assumption that *all* potential groups are asking such questions, that 'identity politics' is spreading like a contagion to become the prime principle of social interaction. The evidence does not support claims that the model of the indivisible republic has completely broken down, or that it was never more than a chimera in the first place.

Recognition of minority rights is of course high on the list of conditions which Turkey is expected to satisfy, before she can even be considered for membership of the European Union. This can hardly be an insuperable problem. After all, founder members of this organization, above all France, have equally strong centralizing traditions. My own expectation is that recent trends will continue, and the east Black Sea coast will be increasingly marketed to tourists as a region of extraordinary ethnic diversity. Trabzon will receive major grants to establish new museums to celebrate Pontic Greek traditions; a little further east, so will the Lazi, Hemşinli and Georgians. These institutional initiatives might then attract support from the local population, especially if there is a material payoff. But if the current intellectual stirrings and these hypothetical institutional changes were to generate a higher level of ethnic consciousness and an ethnicisation of social interaction, this would be something novel, a break not only with the history of the republican period but also with the preceding Ottoman centuries.

VI

This paper has touched on an issue of practical importance in many other countries in the contemporary world, both where ethnicity (nationality) is denied or suppressed and where it is a key factor in the politics and administration of the state. For example, many of the dangers of implementing a federal system along ethnic lines are illustrated by recent developments in Ethiopia, currently the subject of detailed investigations by several colleagues in the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology. It seems to me that social scientists have had little influence upon these developments, and this suggests a failure on their part to define and refine theoretical concepts. Ethnicity has been a core concept of anthropology for some three decades. The collapse of socialist federal states helped to keep it strong in the 1990s. In spite of the recent criticism of 'multiculturalism' and the reification of culture it so often implies, the term ethnicity survives tenaciously.

A closer look reveals that numerous anthropologists have issued warnings concerning the generalization of the term (Eriksen 1993, Banks 1996). Yet attempts to 'deconstruct' the very concept of ethnicity, and in particular to detach it from culture, have been less successful than deconstructions of particular ethnic identities. The number of the latter is legion. For a while, the pendulum swung so far away from 'primordialism' that every cultural identity was presented as 'imagined' or 'invented'. Günther Schlee has been critical of this trend (e.g. 2002) and I agree with him that the metaphor of 'construction' is more appropriate. The raw materials used in the construction of ethnic identities often have long histories, which set limits to the role played by imagination or invention. Schlee is right to emphasize that group boundaries are seldom subject to arbitrary manipulation. Neither he nor Barth pursues the concept of ethnicity itself. Yet this, too, needs to be seen as a construction, possibly even an invention. Of course the root may be traced back to ancient Greek, but it is a relatively recent arrival in English, and it is useful to remember that it does not enjoy the same recognition everywhere, even in languages as close as French. Before ethnicity is used further in scientific research in Anatolia and recommended or prescribed to the Ankara authorities, we need to look again at this term.

The Barthian model pioneered the 'constructionist' approach and has proved extremely fertile in anthropology in recent decades. But perhaps we should remember that it developed out of specific fieldwork projects, above all Barth's own work among Pathans. This model may transfer well to regions such as those studied by Günther Schlee, remote even in recent generations from the integrating pull of an effective centralized state, but a different model might be more appropriate for contemporary Anatolia. The Barthian approach distinguishes concern with the content of an ethnic identity from the role of ethnicity in social organization. The two may, however, be closely connected. In the cases considered here, the long-term history has been one of absorption into powerful state systems, bringing new principles of social interaction and an accelerating loss of cultural differentiation. Whatever one may think of these trends, it is not obvious that anthropologists should support efforts to reverse it and restore ethnicity as a prime principle of social organization – especially if such a classification is now, in the present, rejected by many of the people concerned.

As Barth himself notes in his 1998 Preface to the reissue of his collection, the temptation to equate 'ethnic group' with 'society' or 'culture' has never been entirely banned ("similar ways of thinking are constantly being reintroduced to the social science literature, deriving either from the commonsense reifications of people's own discourse and experience or from the rhetoric of ethnic activists" [1998: 5]). It seems to me that a seductive essentialism is encouraged by the tacit

assumption of many external analysts, however well intentioned, that ethnicity is, as a matter of fact, a leading principle of social organization. As we have seen in Anatolia, this is not always the case. With this caution, we can reaffirm the Barthian approach: "A categorical ascription is an ethnic ascription when it classifies a person in terms of his basic, most general identity, presumptively determined by his origin and background. To the extent that actors use ethnic identities to categorize themselves and others for purposes of interaction, they form ethnic groups in this organizational sense" (1998: 13-4).

Barth is concerned above all with the *positive* social significance of ethnic groups in social life, not with *normative* goals such as preserving ethnic cultural diversity. It follows that, to the extent that interaction is *not* regulated in this way, ethnicity will not be the prime focus of students of social organization. Barth does not provide a charter for anthropologists (or any other external analysts) to participate in restoring ethnicity to the more powerful social role it *might* have played in the distant past by supporting the contemporary activists of the cultural revitalization of ethnic groups.

Finally, I suggest that no single concept is capable of providing a comprehensive framework for all the different kinds of groups that matter to actors in Anatolia today. It is an illusion of our nationalist age to assume that, beneath all the identities that a person espouses, there has to be a single fundament presumptively determined by descent.

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