



Post-Ottoman Topologies:

The Presence of the
Past in the Era of the
Nation-State

Edited by Nicolas Argenti

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his book is a collection of presentations from a workshop that was held at the British School at Athens on May 19-21, 2013. Nicolas Argenti who is a senior lecturer at Brunel University is the editor of the collection.

Because the topic of the book is 'Post-Ottoman Topologies', Argenti has made a good decision in choosing the contributing chapters. The book seems mostly European in scope and authorship. Except for Hart, who works at UCLA- USA, all of the authors cite their institutional affiliations in Europe: five contributors, including the editor, in the UK, two writers in Greece and one in Switzerland.

Nicolas Argenti writes an inclusive introduction in which he explains that the book "examines how individual and collective memories, effective states, and embodied experience are born from episodes of rapid social transformation, crisis, and political violence in the transition from an ethnically and culturally plural empire to a congeries of nation-states defined by nationalist ideologies predicated on the realisation of ethnic and religious homogeneity." Following several crises, the past, present and future of Turkey, Greece and the Balkans become intertwined. Thus, this topic is further developed by the contributors of the collection who allude to various traumas and multi-temporalities of the post-Ottoman world by providing vivid historical examples. While the Ottoman Empire was culturally, religiously, and linguistically plural, the post-Ottoman nation-building process was executed with the desire for monocultural, monolingual, and ethnically homogeneous nation-states. "Rather than dwell on the nationalist rejection of Ottoman cultural heritage, this collection examines not the power, but rather the poverty of nationalistic discourses and historiographies, highlighting the counter-currents with which they are often confronted."

As Argenti argues, the vast majority of memory literature ignores the immanence of plural pasts in the present. Thus, this book provides the audience with the plural pasts regarding human experience and suffering in the post-Ottoman world. Yael Navaro-Yashin (2012) describes it as the past is in and around all the time "where people and external objects are also affectively entangled."

Although it is not possible to discuss each chapter in this review, I will try to juxtapose the eight chapters of the collection according to their overarching themes

and shared methodologies and to mention their most important contributions to the topic.

Firstly, Chapter 2, which discusses Bosniak soldiers' martyrdoms in Bosnia, Chapter 6, which discusses saints' martyrdom in Lesbos, Greece, and Chapter 7, the monument of Messogia in Attica in the memory of Greek civil war and the Nazis' torching of the village during the World War II, can be a group of cases which evoke the past to the people frequently through commemorations and monuments.

In Chapter 2, "Prayer as a History: Of Witnesses, Martyrs, and Plural Posts in Post-War Bosnia-Herzegovina," David Henig, a lecturer at the University of Kent, argues that during the Bosnian War in the 1990s, three main incidents recapture the past in the present; the Srebrenica massacre of 1995 in which over 8,000 male Bosniaks were killed, the destruction of Mostar Bridge and the Bosniak martyrs. Through Muslims' prayers to remember the Bosniak 'martyrs' and through countless commemorative monuments throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina, historical consciousness and monumentalization of the past have shaped the daily lives of the Bosniaks, and relations between the past and the present are formed. In Chapter 6, "Between Dreams and Traces: Memory, Temporality, and the Protection of Sainthood in Lesbos," Severine Rey, a Professor at the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland, asserts that the "long-term effects on Asia Minor refugees of political violence and displacement" can be seen in the Agios Rafail Monastery in Lesbos, Greece, which was built in the 1960s. The majority of the population on the island is not native but is composed of refugees who came from Turkey during the 1923 'Voluntary Population Exchange' between Turkey and Greece. It is believed that the monk Rafail, the deacon Nikolaos and a notable young girl Irini were killed by the Ottomans in early 1463 because they revolted against the island's annexation to the Empire in 1462. They were officially recognised as 'saints' in 1970 by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of İstanbul after the residents of the island saw their ghosts in their dreams and initiated a movement to venerate them. Even though the residents of Lesbos were refugees from Turkey, at the time that they found the bones of these three 'saints', "the refugees seem to have inserted them into their own genealogy." Thus, according to Rey, through the saints' martyrdom, all the victims of violence in the island have remembered their loss as a "topological historicising." Rey chose Agios Rafail's church because it was one of the churches that held

commemoration ceremonies for those saints. In Chapter 7, "Eyes Shut, Muted Voices' Narrating and Temporalizing the Post-Civil War Era through a Monument," Dimitra Gefou-Madianou, a Professor at the Panteion University, argues that the chapter aims to understand "how divergent local histories about loss, betrayal, and political violence, especially when filtered through the monument, were remembered, narrated, and experienced in a present as uncertain, unstable, and critical as the past." The Greekness of the Messogites was questioned by the Athenian elite as well as the local authorities. This exclusion is a recurring event in the lives of the Messogites. The monument of Messogia was erected in 1995 in Attica near Athens by the PASOK government in memory of both the Nazis' burning of the village during the World War II and of the Greek civil war that followed. Through the monument of Messogia, these two events' repeated presence is experienced in people's everyday lives. Hence, the loss, betrayal and the political violence of the past rearranges the time and the historical consciousness of people again and again. The cases presented in chapters 2, 6 and 7 show us the collective memory of violence, displacement and historical consciousness.

Chapter 3, the murder of Hrant Dink, Chapter 4, old inhabitants' seized houses in Prespa Lake and Stolac, and Chapter 5, memorial song for Albanian Flamur Pislî, represent another group of cases in how they present memorializing the past.

In Chapter 3, "Surviving Hrant Dink: Carnal Mourning under the Specter of Senselessness," Alice von Bieberstein, who finished her PhD at the University of Cambridge, notes that "regimes of denial and amnesia may likewise be brushed aside by contemporary events, as in Turkey." On January 19, 2007, Hrant Dink was murdered in front of Agos's office building. Those who killed him were claiming to have killed him for his criticisms of the Turkish government. Subsequently, through lighting candles, leaving flowers, mourning, and crying, the murder became a commemorative event. Thus, on January 23, 2007, approximately 200,000 people joined his funeral procession to the Balıklı Armenian cemetery so that "Hrant Dink's fantasy of good life", the possibility of being both Armenian and a Turkish citizen, could be given a future again. In the interviews that von Bieberstein conducted with Armenian people living in İstanbul, however, it can be understood that they are still reluctant to talk about past and present injustices for fear of being killed like Hrant Dink or being exposed to violence. Thus, emigrating

becomes an option for them. In Chapter 4, "The Material Life of War at the Greek Border," Laurie Karin Hart, a Professor at UCLA, asserts that the returned refugees, who migrated during the Greek civil war (1946-49) to two places (the Prespa Lake and Stolac), show us the time effects through abandoned but architecturally impressive buildings there. Prespa Lake is the international border of Albania, Northern Macedonia, and Greece, and Stolac is located in today's Bosnia-Herzegovina. Both places are ethnically plural, therefore ethnic engineering policies have been applied thereafter many wars; World War II, the Greek Civil War and the Balkan wars in the 1990s. New migrants have been placed in old inhabitants' houses. When the latter returned in the late 1990s and early 2000s, they have been unable to retrieve the seized property. Hart calls it "collective historical demons." In Chapter 5, "(Re) Sounding Histories: On the Temporalities of the Media Event," Penelope Papailias, an Associate Professor at the University of Thessaly, claims that "the past can remain present and open to interpretation in the aporias of media broadcasting". In this chapter, Papailias investigates the hijacking event instigated by Flamur Pislî. Pislî is seen as a criminal by the Greeks and as a hero by the Albanians. On May 28, 1999, Pislî hijacked a bus in a town near Thessaloniki and took the driver, ticket collector and passengers hostage. Pislî claimed that "he was driven to this action because three local men (a security guard, a policeman, and a store factory owner) had framed him on charges of weapons smuggling and that [he had been beaten and raped] while in detention for those charges." Albanian snipers ultimately shot Pislî, and a 28-year-old Greek hostage Yiorgos Koulouris accidentally, live on television. While Greek people were mobilized after the hijacking, later an Albanian singer wrote a memorial song for Pislî, which emphasizes Pislî's act of "speaking back." This hijacking event has been reproduced again and again through the memorial song by the Albanian male migrants shuttling from border to their hometowns. For Papailias, "this event radically rearranged time, space, and bodies."

Last but not least, Chapter 1 in which Greek debt crisis recalls the pre-modern village life and Chapter 8 in which Golden Dawn Party recalls the Spartans while the Greek civil war recalls the Ottoman *devshirme* system represent a group of cases which explain the present according to past traumas in a similar way.

In Chapter 1, "Fossilized Futures: Topologies and Topographies of Crisis Experience in Central Greece,"

Daniel M. Knight, a lecturer at the University of St Andrews, addresses the collective anxiety triggered by the Greek sovereign debt crisis. In Trilaka/Kalampaka, people are going fossil hunting on New Year's Day, and they collect the hunted soils in boxes. In this way, people identify themselves through objects and landscapes. Knight argues that "topography and topology are closely related ... tools to successfully translate local life experiences." According to the Greeks, whom the writer talked to about coping with the economic crisis, two contrasting energy sources - high-tech photovoltaic panels and open wood-burning fires - can be seen as symbols of the dichotomy of ultra-modernity, clean-green energy versus pre-modern village life, pollution versus poverty. Thus, the Greek debt crisis throughout the 2010s reminds Greek people of the bad conditions of the Greek civil war. That is, opening wood-burning fires reminds them of pre-modernity, which is directly linked to the civil war. In Chapter 8, "Uncanny History: Temporal Topology in the Post-Ottoman World," Charles Stewart, who works as a Professor at University College London, discusses "uncanny returns caused by the Great Depression or the civil war." For example, he alludes to the life story of Jackie Robinson, who was the first African American major league baseball player in the 1940s: "Starting in 2004, a Jackie Robinson Day (April 15) was instituted, and in April 2013, the film 42 was released to coincide with Jackie Robinson Day." He chooses an example from the USA at the beginning of his chapter in order to show that these cases of topological history are not always found in peripheral places. According to Stewart, "documentary evidence may not kill myths, but changing times do." He asserts that the past "flashes us" to historical consciousness in times of danger. He emphasises the term '*paidomazoma*' (*devshirme* in Turkish) which was an Ottoman practice of converting Christian children to Muslim Janissaries. During the civil war in Greece, the children in care from various Greek institutions were evacuated by the Greek Communist Party into Eastern Bloc countries. This was called '*paidomazoma*', used for 'kidnapping', while the government's evacuation of children was named as 'child protection'. This shows how "mythicized image of *paidomazoma* still animates government policies." In the twenty-first century, a new polarisation in Greek politics occurred with the extreme right-wing Golden Dawn political party came to the scene. The Golden Dawn sees itself like the ancient Spartans, which concludes with a Pakistani migrant's murder by a supporter of the Golden Dawn. As an example of reproducing times of danger, he alludes to the execution of Pir Sul-

tan Abdal in the sixteenth-century Ottoman Empire as historically analogous to the burning of the Madimak Hotel in Sivas, where 37 Alevi visitors were killed in 1993 during the Pir Sultan Abdal commemoration events. Past traumas lead to historical consciousness to establish links between these experiences. The Madimak event and the martyrdom of the sixteenth century Pir Sultan Abdal are thus linked.

In sum, this book is composed of eight chapters that encompass remarkable topics. The efforts of the writers, who travelled to the post-Ottoman places and conducted interviews and made observations there to understand the places' or local people's past traumas and to draw connections to the present, should be appreciated. Even though the introduction chapter written by Argenti provides an effective and inclusive entrance into the text and the cases are presented very successfully in the eight chapters, due to the absence of a concluding chapter the book seems not to close satisfyingly. Therefore, he might also have provided concluding remarks at the end of the book after all the case studies were given. Nevertheless, it is the book's notable success that the connection between past traumas and the present in the post-Ottoman topographies is established through diverse cases in the eight chapters. This thought-provoking and analytically helpful book will be a catalyst for further research for those working on the 'presence of the past'.