

University Seminar #511 OTTOMAN AND MODERN TURKISH SEMINAR

In cooperation with

University Seminar #703: Modern Greek Seminar

Speakers: Evangelos Kechriotis & Elektra Kostopoulou

Presiding Chair: Christine Philiou, Columbia University

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Abstract of Vangelis Kechriotis's article:

“This paper tackles in a concise manner an issue more broadly addressed in my thesis entitled *The Greeks of Izmir at the end of the Empire a non-Muslim Ottoman Community between autonomy and Patriotism*. It starts with an incident of political violence, in Izmir in the fall of 1908, through the different accounts provided by the relevant sources, which are used in order to demonstrate the common vocabulary and the parallel concerns tormenting both the Greek-Orthodox and the Turkish-Muslim elites. Following that, it discusses the impact that the debate on post-colonialism had on Late Ottoman studies. This debate, even if it does not look very relevant to political history accounts on the 1908 Constitutional Movement is nevertheless germane to the experience of the modernization attempts in the Empire and the continuous negotiation between the central authority and the diverse communities. By referring to the debate on the ‘Ottoman version of colonialism’, I reflect on the implication that Christian subordination to Muslim rule could have in terms of colonial domination. Eventually, I argue that, unlike the canonical character pertinent to the non-Muslim colonial discourse addressing Muslim subjects, in this case we witness a struggle between two mutually exclusive colonizing discourses which by offering equality to their opponents wish to prove that the latter do not accomplish the values of civilization and progress and therefore do not deserve to dominate the process of political transformation.”

Abstract of Elektra Kostopoulou's article:

"Hybrid Ottoman Geographies: Revisiting the Bi-religious Polity of Autonomous Crete"

Elektra Kostopoulou, Princeton University

The proclamation of Autonomous Crete (1898-1912)—a bi-religious polity shared between a majority of Christians (2/3) and a minority of Muslims (1/3)—may attract one's interest for a variety of reasons and with regard to different issues. The present analysis has concentrated, in particular, on the intermingling profiles of the island's local communities. The argument put forward here has been that the origins, nature, and implications of Cretan autonomy could be treated as a paradigmatic case of local fluid identities and of hybridity between the Empire and the Nation-State; or Christians and Muslims. It has been suggested, furthermore, that Autonomous Crete could be used as a methodological experiment in dealing with issues concerning Hellenic and Ottoman Studies in general. Moreover, in order to avoid abstract and confusing generalizations, specific examples from the island's Ottoman and Autonomous past have been used as illustrations of the underlying theory. In this respect, it has been argued that the study of the Hellenic-Ottoman interface over Autonomous Crete could be used as the model to study the multiple conceptual and actual bridges that emerged between imperialism, nationalism, and the Mediterranean's imperial past at the end turn of the much debated

nineteenth century. From this point of view, this presentation has been about an island that captured the uncertainties of a whole era.

Powerpoint visuals from Elektra Kostopoulou's presentation:

- December 9, 1898 Prince George arrives in Crete
- The flag of Autonomous Crete representing the local Christian and Muslim communities
- Map of the Ottoman Empire (1683-1923)
- Legend of the rising of the flag of revolution-1865 (oil painting)
- Janissaries (miniature painting)
- Photo of Janissaries Mosque at Hania –Crete
- Photo of Mehmet Bey-Mayor of Hania (important town in autonomous Crete)
- Photo of the remnants of the Turkish cemetery in Crete

Rountable-Discussion Points:

Prof. Philliou: Emerging Ottoman historiography of the conflict. What the conflict was? How does it fit into the larger discussions?

Kostopoulou: Both cases have vibrant local histories. Smyrna on one side (from Turkish nationalist perspective, it is Greek) Crete has a strong local dialect (From the Greek side, Cretan Islam is not seen as legitimate. Always seen as foreign body) What do you do with the intense local dimension? Are there similar dynamics as in Bulgaria? (Muslims in Bulgaria was ignored in Bulgarian historiography.)

Prof. Philliou The missing ingredient in other articles is the issues of power. Do people make decisions of where they belong in a vacuum or not? How large the distribution was for that newspaper in Smyrna?

Kechriotis: Smyrna is symbolically important both for Turkish and Greek nationalistic discourse. The way the Smyrna was different in Turkish context –after 80 years Prime minister calls it “Gavur Izmir” (Infidel Izmir) Power politics were re-produced in Izmir. Each one of the Ottoman port cities were different in their own way (Thessaloniki, Istanbul, Aleppo) Ideologically, this power situation is reflected on the local newspapers. Amarthia and Ithaca were the most important Greek newspapers established and distributed in Asia Minor. A large part of the population on both sides took it seriously. Many of the readers could perfectly read in Greek and in Turkish. So they could answer the arguments perfectly in both languages. New public sphere was shaped around these newspapers. When the time came for voting in Smyrna the main problem was: Who is an Ottoman citizen, who is not? This was problematic. Many claimed they were local residents and had right to vote. Many of them knew what it meant to vote. They had to use their know-how in Ottoman politics when the time came for voting. Local bureaucrats were pushing the Muslim people to vote but Muslims were not interested. The crucial point is: do you have an argument about claiming your own place? This was the same case when it came to Armenians. They have similar visions. So do Jews.

Kostopoulou: Crete was different but not that different from the rest of the Ottoman land. Lebanon, Egypt were in a similar situation. All of them were autonomous localities but all of

them are represented as unique. Ottomans were experimenting with new ideas of citizenship. It is never about tolerance, ruling. It is always the product of negotiations. But when it comes to late Ottoman era there are no negotiations. It was either success or failure. The local is very important. Locality cannot be discussed without colonial and imperial practices of the administration. Ottomans were aware of the new ideas coming into their land. It was their last attempt to keep together the Empire. Empire's effort to keep their sovereignty right is not looked into carefully. Both on local and central level, the Cretan towns were still imperial institutions. During the second half of the 20th century the concepts the Ottoman administration was interested in had changed, a new set of negotiations come into place. Centralizing the Empire to save it—as many academics suggest- may not be the right argument. Regarding the rosy picture created by other writers, Elektra does not agree with it. Challenging the stereotype is important for me. It might not be stimulating to many but academically it is important.

Q & A session Main Points:

- Bourgeois groups were perceived and studied as intermediaries – especially in Modern Greek Studies.
- Defining people as Muslim-Non Muslim-Christian is problematic.
- There is a tradition of power relations which allowed a new way to reiterate the old practices –especially in political discourse. Selim Bey was trying to make the empire as an European Empire but another Sultan was trying the opposite, therefore acting closer to the Arabic rule. We need to reflect other possibilities than the ones already presented. The Christian population made up of not only by Greeks but also Armenians, Levantens and others (Jews) were colonized culturally in Smyrna. So it is possible to connect political and cultural colonialism.
- Power is extremely flexible at this region. The more you try to define and compare, the more complex it gets.
- Looking into economic aspect of this issue is important as well but it is a different kind of study. The reason why cultural studies is underlines is that this is the time the middle class was re-defined. They are trying to build their own social capital with different means. People dealing with commerce, banking are different kind of people. Economic aspect enables us to connect in a broader context.
- Cyprus- the same dynamic was not created by the Muslim community as in Crete. Muslims of Cyprus remained rural and did not get involved in politics. In Crete, they were forced to move to the cities since they did not feel safe in the countryside. Agriculture was ruined due to wars. So from the economic perspective, they needed to leave the countryside.

- New ways of thinking about fluidity- People were doing things that were in their own economic self interests. Muslim identity remained Muslim in Crete because of the Beginning of the 19th century, Janissaries became to convert to Islam so they could gain access to number of privileges.