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PROJECT

"National Indifference" as a Modern Phenomenon? Theories of the Pervasiveness and Intensity of Nationalism and Their Application in the Field of Balkan History

My research project has the ambition to contribute to the ongoing debates on the temporality and social diffusion of nationalism in modern European societies by exploring the analytical potential but also the limits of the concept of "national indifference" in the study of modern and contemporary Balkan history. By crediting this concept explanatory value, the proposed research tries to understand self-identifications and external categorizations of Balkan societies since the late nineteenth century, which are often obscured by national historians; the research surveys the practical choices and reasons of concrete (non-)élite populations, but it also tackles more general problems related to their study, such as the temporal scales of the spread of nationalism, the social logics of loyalty and pragmatism, the relationship between identity and interest, and the extent to which nationalism is quantifiable. The proposed study draws on a variety of sources from the late Ottoman era to the period of the Greek Civil War: from travelogues and scholarly and political publications to (un)official statistics, secret reports, (un)published autobiographies, and letters addressed to various institutions. By analyzing the whole spectrum of "national indifference" in Balkan contexts, my research project tries to reconcile existing theories of the pervasiveness and intensity of nationalism, on the one hand, with the emphasis on the circumstantialist and interactionist character of identity, on the other. By demonstrating the contingent and variably salient character of self-identifications, categorizations, and political loyalties, my project also seeks to go beyond the classic question "When is a nation?" and to expose the multiple temporalities of modern nationalism.

Recommended Reading

Marinov, Tchavdar. *La Question Macédonienne de 1944 à nos jours: Communisme et nationalisme dans les Balkans*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010.

Daskalov, Roumen, and Tchavdar Marinov, eds. *Entangled Histories of the Balkans: Vol. 1: National Ideologies and Language Policies*. Leiden: Brill, 2013.

Marinov, Tchavdar. *"Nos ancêtres les Thraces": Usages idéologiques de l'Antiquité en Europe du Sud-Est*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2016.

The “Anomalies” of Nationhood: Recent Theories of the Intensity and Spread of Nationalism in Modern Societies and Their Application in the Field of Balkan History

My presentation has three aims. In its introductory part, I will try to present the state of the art in a specific field of study: the history of nationalism in Southeast Europe (or the Balkans). After exposing some traditional clichés in this field and the ways they have been “debunked” since the 1990s, I will briefly discuss the application of concepts and methodologies that were expected to overcome the essentializing of national identity: among these, comparative and transnational histories, entangled histories, and “histoire croisée”. I will thereby try to reveal certain desiderata in the current research that are related mostly to the domination of a top-down approach and of a frequently exclusive focus on ideologies and mainstream narratives in the Balkan contexts.

Following my introductory remarks, I will address the prospects offered by certain concepts aiming to grasp the mechanisms and temporality of the spread of nationalism as well as its contextual and various relevance and intensity in modern societies. Among these are notions such as “nationhood from below,” “popular nationalism,” and “everyday ethnicity,” but also “national indifference,” which will merit special attention in my presentation. Its first main part will seek to explore the analytical potential but also the limitations of the concept of “national indifference,” as well as the ways its application may be helpful in the field of modern and contemporary Balkan history. While attempting to uncover potential pitfalls and to question the explanatory value of this concept, I will also focus on self-identifications, external categorizations, and practical choices that have been obscured by national historians, as well as on more general epistemological problems and questions, such as the social logics of loyalty and pragmatism and the relationship between identity and interest.

While “national indifference” has often been stigmatized and discarded by modern national élites as an “anomaly” that was doomed to disappear for good, the history of national activists and leaders itself presents a number of “abnormalities,” such as multiple identities, side-switching between different national options, and commitments to more than one national ideology. In the final part, I will shift the focus of my presentation from the field of mass politics and popular responses to national mobilizations, to the microlevel of individual biographies. By this change of scales, I will try to question the strict separation between histories “from above” and “from below” and between “national(ist) élites” and “opportunistic masses” and to formulate more general epistemological questions related to the temporality of modern nationalism and the relationship between the individual and social levels of analysis.

Geographically, my presentation will deal mostly with the multiethnic region of Macedonia, but it will also draw on examples from other parts of the broader area of Southeast Europe (the Balkans). It will likewise rely on a variety of sources from the late Ottoman era through the period of the Greek Civil War (1946-49): from travelogues through scholarly and political publications to (un)official statistics, secret reports, (un)published autobiographies, and letters addressed to various public institutions.

PUBLICATIONS FROM THE FELLOW LIBRARY

Marinov, Tchavdar (London,2019)

Regionalism in south-eastern Europe

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1813314330>

Marinov, Tchavdar (Leiden,2017)

Entangled histories of ... ; Volume 4 ; Concepts, approaches, and (self-)representations

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=884806189>

Entangled histories of the Balkans ; volume 4

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=884806189>

Marinov, Tchavdar (Paris,2016)

Nos ancêtres les Thraces : usages idéologiques de l'Antiquité en Europe du Sud-Est

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=848005384>

Historiques

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=848005384>

Marinov, Tchavdar (Leiden [u.a.],2013)

Entangled histories of ... ; Vol. 1 ; National ideologies and language policies

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=755890442>

Entangled histories of the Balkans ; Vol. 1

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=755890442>