

Ottomanism: A Transition from Byzantinism to Balkanism

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Abstract

Ottomanism as an ideology and way of life is nothing but a pale copy of Byzantinism. Ottomanism is the direct successor of the Eastern Roman Empire (the Byzantine Empire), which is the legal and sole successor to the only Roman Empire. But Ottomanism itself has not been sufficiently studied because much more attention has been paid to the way the Ottoman Empire was governed than to the identities that it sought to define as its own, which were in fact nothing more than a faint copy of Byzantinism before 1204.

Ottomanism can be defined as the imperial identity of the Ottoman Empire. But what is more interesting is the fact that the same identity is the successor of the Byzantine one — that is, Roman imperial identity, which did not recognize cultures and ethnicities. And Ottomanism is a solid basis for the development of the specific Balkan nationalism today, which is also known as Balkanism. A comparative analysis of the Ottomanism with Byzantinism and with the modern science of nations and nationalism will prove the hypothesis that: *Ottomanism is the foundation for the modern Balkan nationalism.*

Key words: Ottomanism, Balkanism, nationalism, ethnicity, nation, identity, Byzantinism

Byzantinism as an Introduction to Ottomanism

Byzantinism — the constructed East Roman identity of the Byzantine Empire — is a perennial connection of this empire with the Roman Empire. This connection can only be defined as terminus technicus because the Byzantine Empire is the natural successor to the Roman Empire.¹

What is more interesting is the fact that in order to create that so-called Byzantine identity, a connection was forged between the Latin and the classical Greek and Hellenistic culture. Analyzing Byzantinism, it can be concluded that it is merely an artificial construction of identity imposed on the subjects of the empire in order to unite them under the rule of the emperor in Constantinople.

¹ Conev, B. (2018). *Byzantinism as Fundament of the Balkanism* in (2018) Hiperboreea Journal vol. 5, num. 1. Bucharest: Balkan History Association. pp.17-32.

Constructing this Byzantine identity during the Palaiologan dynasty (1261-1453), the authorities in Constantinople realized that the population of the empire, apart from imperial rule, must unite culturally and ethnically in order to preserve its unity. However, this way of imagined unification in Byzantine Empire actually represents the beginning of its end.

It led to a process of the annihilation of the imperial power itself because if until 1204 the emperor was the unifying element of the entire population in the empire, after 1261 the unifying element began to be embodied through the revival of classical Greek and Hellenistic culture — giving less importance to the heritage of Rome upon which the Byzantine Empire itself was founded.

Considering more structurally the idea of Byzantinism as a basis for Ottomanism, and later as a basic element of modern Balkanism, it can be concluded that the change in the view of the state provides the basis for the biggest problem in the Balkans today — that is, the ethnic intolerance between different groups in the region. If until the Fourth Crusade of 1202-1204, in Byzantine Empire the emperor himself was a unifying factor for the group that defines itself as “rhomaioi”,² and not the language, traditions or culture, it means that the Byzantine state applied modernism as a theory for determining and defining the nation

In fact, the transition from a perennial to a modern interpretation of the unity of the Byzantine population took place at the same time when it was beginning to sever its historical ties with Rome, when the city fell to the barbarians in 476. Although declaratively and legally, the Byzantine Empire until the end of its days is considered the successor of Rome and the sole bearer of its heritage, the removal of Roman heritage such as culture, Latin language, traditions and customs and the turn to imperialism signify that in the empire is happening a reversal that in itself contributes to changing the self-determination of the population living in that country.

Moving from a perennial to a modern interpretation of the identifying elements of the population means that in the period before the restoration of the empire by the Palaiologos in 1261 for the Byzantine Empire, although the modernist determination that “modern man is neither loyal to the ruler, nor to the state, nor to religion as it is loyal to culture”³ was not valid, however, according to the adherents of this theory, what connects the group is the general legal-economic framework in the country, as well as the language with the help of which the society itself is promoted.

² Moravcsik, G. and Jenkins R. J. H. (1962, 1967). *De administrando imperio* (2 vols.). Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks, Center for Byzantine Studies.

³ Gellner, E. (1983). *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Blackwell. pp. 36.

This creation of the so-called Byzantinism means that the Byzantine emperors were successful in not allowing any ethnic group in the empire to have supremacy over the others, i.e., they managed to separate the pre-national (ethnic) self-identification of the population from the state bodies in order not to suppress the multiethnic character of the state.⁴ In this way, for several centuries, the creation of protonationalism, which is in fact a mixture of nationalism and populism, was prevented.⁵

The beginning of Byzantinism and the end of Byzantine Empire began when in the year 1261 Michael VIII conquered Constantinople and was proclaimed Emperor. In order to rebuild the empire, the Palaiologos began to transform it as a Greek nation-state while hegemonizing its Hellenic identity over the other cultural identities of the various groups in Byzantine Empire⁶.

That is the start of the so-called revival of Hellenism which would in fact lead to disobedience of other groups to the empire in Constantinople and a reluctance to support it in the struggle against the Ottomans. In fact, it can be concluded that the change in the interpretation of identities in the Byzantine Empire from perennial (i.e., modernist) to ethnosymbolistic (i.e., primordial) leads to its collapse after several centuries.⁷

In the same way that Constantinople is perennially connected with Rome, so the Ottomans after the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 try to be perennially connected with the heritage of the Byzantine Empire. It is the perennial connection that means that in these two empires they do not grow into nation-states in which one ethnicity manages to assimilate the others, as was the case with the Byzantine Empire during the reign of the Palaiologos (1261-1453). However, the connection is made in a way that indicates to the population the historical continuity of the state, which allows it, despite identifying with its own culture and values, to identify itself with the imperial government that comes directly to the sovereign in Constantinople.

This way of perennial connection actually aims to show the permanence of the empire that would contribute to achieve inner peace in it. Consistency, in contrast to cyclicity, also contributes to the connection of the population with each other. Namely, in both empires, the Byzantine Empire before 1204 and the Ottoman Empire after 1453, the populations were allowed to identify with their local identities, but within the limits set by the emperor in Constantinople, in order not to allow strengthening ethnic identity in relation to imperial power.

⁴ Chrysos, E. (1996). *The Roman Political Identity in late antiquity and early Byzantium* in (1996) Fledelius and Scheiner . pp. 7-16.

⁵ Hobsbawn, E. (1984). *World of Labour*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson

⁶ Kaldellis, A. (2007). *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformation of the Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

⁷ Conev, B. (2018). *The Byzantinism as Fundament of the Balkanism* in (2018) *Hiperboreea Journal* vol. 5, num. 1. Bucharest : Balkan History Association. pp.17-32.

To achieve this effect, for the Byzantine Empire before 1204 and for the Ottoman Empire after 1453, the unifying element was religion. For the Byzantine Empire, it was Orthodoxy;⁸ for the Ottomans, it was the millet system according to which every single subject who practices one of the recognized Abrahamic religions in the empire can be identified as a subject of the padishah.⁹

The only difference between this type of Byzantinism and the early Ottomanism that originated after 1453 is that in the Byzantine Empire the only accepted and recognized religion is Orthodox Christianity, and in the Ottoman Empire according to the millet system, it is Islam, Orthodox Christianity and later Judaism. In fact, the difference occurs in that segment in the development of the states that Orthodoxy in Byzantine Empire itself generates cultural values that are generally acceptable to all the population,¹⁰ i.e. it also generates identity attributes that although common to different ethnicities, have penetrated deep into the identity of modern Balkan nations.

Unlike the Byzantine Empire, in the Ottoman Empire, the millet system of religious subdivision does not allow the generation of generally accepted values in all three religious groups that would later be transferred to the national identities of the nations that emerged after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.¹¹

When comparing Byzantinism and Ottomanism it can be said that the biggest difference between these two imperial identities, which have never grown into national ones, is that, although the starting point for both is the perennial interpretation of the identity of all the population, the Byzantinism later from perennial-modernist grows into a primordial¹² one which aims to emphasize the common organic-biological^{13,14} origin of all subjects, i.e. through the hegemony of Hellenism to create the so-called Byzantine-Greek nation.¹⁵

⁸ Dagon, G. (1976). Minorite's ethniques et religieuses dans l'Orient byzantin á la X-e et au XI-e siècle. L'immigration syrienne. Travaux et Mémoires 6. pp. 177-216.

⁹ Finkel, C. (2005). *Osman's Dream : The Story of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1923*. London : John Murray.

¹⁰ Mango, C. (1980). *Byzantium. The Empire of New Rome*. New York: Scribner.

¹¹ Schevill, F. (1991). *A History of the Balkans*. New York: Dorset Press.

¹² Geertz, C. (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

¹³ van den Berghe, P.L. (1987). *The ethnic phenomenon*. Westport: Praeger Publishers.

¹⁴ Shils, E. (1957). Primordial, Personal, Sacred and Civil Ties in *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 7, pp. 13-45.

¹⁵ Kaldellis, A. (2007). *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformation of the Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Unlike Byzantinism, Ottomanism has no possibility of overcoming the perennial (i.e. modernist) idea of the existence of the empire because there is no possibility for the ethnic groups living in the Balkans to be organically and biologically linked to the Ottoman Turks, Arabs and other non-Orthodox groups in the empire.¹⁶ Precisely for this reason, Ottomanism never gained momentum in the Ottoman Empire, except in the early 20th century during the Young Turk Revolution (1908) when the idea that the Ottoman state was a state of the Turks, that is, the birth of the so-called Turkish-Ottoman nationalism.¹⁷ Yet it is only a brief period of a few years before the collapse of the empire.

The inability to make a primordial connection with the states (i.e., cultures that historically lived on the territory of the Balkans) opens the door for the Ottomans to take advantage of the perennial connection. As pointed out above in this text, the perennial connection allows them to consolidate the imperial power of the padishah in Constantinople, in order to “justify their existence in this part of the world.”¹⁸ In this way, Ottomanism becomes a modified addition to that Byzantinism that was before 1204 — that is, it becomes a systematic continuation of the imperial policy of oppression of the peoples and their cultural degradation as opposed to the connection on religious grounds.¹⁹ Cultural degradation occurs not because of the hegemonizing of a particular culture as in the case of Byzantinism, but because of the hegemonization and favoritism of Islam as a religion, which in itself generates cultural values and traditions in a similar way to Orthodox Christianity.²⁰

Skillfully avoiding primordialism, because they would never be able to justify the organic-biological connection between the Turkish and Asian populations with the autochthonous Orthodox Greek and Slavic population in the Balkans,²¹ the Ottomans managed to create a specific process of forming collective memory in the Balkan population, which is reflected to this day in the generated worship of the ruler — that is, of the hegemonic religious group.²²

¹⁶ Karpat, K.H. (1973). An inquiry into the social foundations of nationalism in the Ottoman state: From social estates to classes, from millets to nations. Princeton: Center of International Studies, Princeton University.

¹⁷ Haddad W. W., Ochsenwald, W. (1977). Nationalism in a non-national state: the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.

¹⁸ Berlin, I. (1969). Four Essays on Liberty. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁹ van den Berghe, P.L. (1978). *Race and Ethnicity: A Socio-biological Perspective* in *Ethnic and Racial Studies (Journal)*, vol. 1, no. 4, pp. 401-411.

²⁰ Dagon, G. (1976). *Minorite's ethniques et religieuses dans l'Orient byzantin à la X-e et au XI-e siècle. L'immigration syrienne.* Travaux et Mémoires 6.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

This change in the collective memory also contributed to changes in the collective memory of the Balkan nations, which were recognized as separate in the 19th century and began to fight for secession from the empire, so that in the collective memory of all Balkan nations, the Ottoman period of their history has great pejorative significance. The pejorative for the Ottomans, (i.e., the Turks) contributes to the transformation of the perception of the Balkan nations for all of their neighbors because the the imperial government's skillful manipulation of certain ethnicities and groups in the Balkans in the past contributed to growing intolerance and tension among Balkan nations today.

Ethno-confessional Identity as a Basis for the Division and Functioning of the Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman "millet system" (i.e., the division of groups in the country according to the religious affiliation) in historiography and political science) is known as the most prominent precedent for formulating cultural (i.e., ethno-confessional) autonomy of different groups in a state.²³ In fact, this system of a division of the population is a religious but also ethnic-linguistic autonomy of the different ethnicities (i.e., religious groups) in the Ottoman Empire.

The millet system draws its strength from and is based on the Ottoman multicultural and multireligious aspect of the population in the Ottoman Empire; it is not built as a basic social concept for the functioning of that state. This way of state and social order is based on the concept of dividing the largest religious communities in such way that each of them would have the status of a legal entity in the state bureaucracy and with the recognition of each "millet" it receives certain privileges from the ruler.²⁴

However, when it comes to privileges, this applies only to the Muslim population in the country, because it is defined as a basic entity without which the Ottoman Empire could not exist. The millet was actually a kind of inclusive system that brought together people of the same religion no matter what province in which they lived. Constituted as the basic administrative apparatus of the state, the millet system provided non-Muslims with the opportunity to embody a separate identity that is characteristic of their group, and thus to nurture their collective cultural, linguistic, ethnic and religious values. Namely, in that way in the Ottoman state, several different local identities were created which were nurtured by the individual identities of the individuals, but which had to be harmonized with the religious affiliation of both the individual and the group.

²³ Bauböck, R. *Political autonomy or cultural minority rights ? A conceptual critique of Renner's model*, in E. Nimni. pp. 109-110.

²⁴ Boztemur, R.(2005). *Historical Foundations of Multiculturalism in the Ottoman Empire, The Challenges of Multiculturalism in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. by Sandu Frunza, Nicu Gavriluta, Michael S. Jones, Cluj Napoca: Editura Provopress.

Thus, each group or millet consisted of a population that, in addition to being part of a state pre-national system, created its own identity²⁵ which, after the collapse of the empire, transformed into a national one. The problem in the Balkans arises from a time when the Orthodox millet, or ethnicities that are part of the Ottoman state, formed nation-states in the 19th century, and they have such an intertwined history and collective memory that it is reflected in a conflict of identities.

Conflict of identities occurs when more nations have the same heroes or myths in their collective memory, and they use them to emphasize their values and to disparage the values of the neighboring nation with which they share identity and historical features. It is the Ottoman heritage of the Balkans (i.e., the millet system in which all modern Balkan countries lived) that contributes to the development of nationalism in this area today, because all nations and ethnicities in the region share a common history — a collective memory and myths from the Ottoman period. The reason, of course, lies only in the Ottoman division of the population into millets. Thus, according to Anthony Smith, ordinary conflicts of (national) interests turn into cultural, moral and political crusades or jihad that occupy the everyday political scene.²⁶

Analyzing the millet system in the Ottoman state, it can be concluded that all the subjects of the sultan, although divided according to their religious identity, still had one unifying factor, and that is the so-called “Ottoman identity” — the loyalty to the ruler and to the imperial administrative-bureaucratic apparatus. Although when it comes to “Ottoman” identity it cannot be classified as national, nor as ethnic, it can be said that it is in fact a socio-political identity especially in the Tanzimat²⁷ period, where it is categorized only as loyalty to the ruler, who in fact, had no authority over religious matters in the country.

The Ottoman system can most easily be explained as an institutional-political framework that contains religious inclusiveness of non-national elements called millets. Namely, the millets themselves are defined as ethno-linguistic and ethnic groups. Regarding this form of government, Kemal Karpat says: “The millet system actually produces both religious universality and local parochialism”.²⁸ This means that the local units of the millet became an incubator for the development of ethnic-national feelings among the population in the 19th century in the Balkans, resulting in uprisings for liberation from the Ottoman rule of certain Balkan ethnicities.

²⁵ Brown, L.C. (1995). ‘The Ottoman legacy in the Balkans’, in *Imperial Legacy: The Ottoman Imprint in the Balkans and the Middle East*. New York: Columbia University Press.

²⁶ Smith, A. (1999). *Myths and Memories of the Nation*. New York: Oxford University Press. pp. 9.

²⁷ The Turkish historian and sociologist Niyaz Berkes is acknowledging the word “tanzim” or plural “tanzimat” as “getting in order”, which literally means socio-political period in the Ottoman Empire from 1839 until the 60s of the 19th century.

²⁸ Karpat, K. H. (1982). *Millets and Nationality: The Roots of Incongruity of Nation and State in the Post-Ottoman Era*, in B. Braude and B. Lewis (eds) *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, New York and London: Holmes & Meier. pp. 147.

In this context it can be said that the millet system itself over time turns into a generator of ethnic and religious intolerance between the various groups in the Ottoman Empire, and it can be defined as the beginning of Balkan nationalism.

The Ottoman millet system can be defined as a form of social organization in which religious identity takes precedence over other identity features of each of the groups, and especially in relation to ethnicity. This way of defining the millet system opens the possibility for analysis in terms of which religions are accepted in the country, and which religions are generally recognized by the imperial government in Constantinople. If one examines in detail the millet system of the Ottoman state, one can see that all monotheistic religions were recognized by the sultan, and thus they were able to create local identities that have not an ethnic, but a unified religious character.

The very recognition of the religious identity of groups, as well as individuals, provided them with a kind of “imaginary” mechanism for protection for all, except Muslims — a mechanism that allowed different millets to self-determine in accordance with their religious identities, and in the 19th century with the ethnic ones because the religious identity in the empire gradually started becoming the basic identity feature of the different ethnicities in it.

The practice of institutionalizing religious communities in the Ottoman state began immediately after the conquest of Constantinople (1453) in 1454 and was established by Sultan Mehmet II. The first created millet was the Orthodox one, followed by the Armenian millet in 1461 and the Jewish one in the late 15th century.²⁹ Namely, immediately after the institutionalization of each millet, its leader begins with a process of unification of the features that unite the members of that millet.

What is interesting about the Balkans is that although most of the population in this part of the empire is Orthodox and submissive to the Ecumenical Patriarch, in the late 18th and throughout the 19th century the ethnic character began to dominate over the religious. In fact, the dominance of ethnic over religious identity among the Balkan ethnicities is the result of their centuries-long subordination, as well as the desire of these ethnicities to promote the religious and ethnic identity values that are unique to their group.

This domination of ethnic over religious identity in the 19th century resulted in a struggle for secession and the formation of independent nation-states of the Balkan peoples living within the Ottoman Empire.

²⁹ Boztemur, R. (2005). *Historical Foundations of Multiculturalism in the Ottoman Empire, The Challenges of Multiculturalism in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. by Sandu Frunza, Nicu Gavriluta, Michael S. Jones, Cluj Napoca: Editura ProvoPress.

The centuries-old dominance of religious over ethnic identity within the millet system in the Ottoman state created a general state of shared collective memory that for the Balkan peoples opened the door to extreme nationalism that resulted in extremism. The outcome is putting one's own ethnicity on a pedestal and humiliating one's neighbor with whom you share a common history. It is for this reason that Ottomanism and its millet system can be defined as the basis of today's Balkan nationalism or Balkanism.

The Ottoman millet system of governance illuminates the basic difference between the way the nation states were formed in Europe and in the Balkans. Namely, unlike Europe where ethnic identity has an advantage in the formation of the nation, the Balkan nations later in the 19th century began to enter the era of national awakening and realizing that what actually makes the nation homogeneous and connects it is not the religion but the identity of the group.³⁰

If we need to define identity, the best definition for it is given by Anthony Smith; he emphasizes that there are generally accepted features that identify all members of a group, such as language, traditions, culture, values, common legal and economic framework, and in some exceptional cases, religion.³¹

Thus, according to Kemal Karpat, this huge difference is due solely to the fact that although the Ottoman Empire as a multiethnic state was able to create a unified identity, the advantage that Muslims had in the existing millet system prevented other groups from being embodied as on religious, as well as on ethnic grounds, to identify themselves with the "Ottoman" imperial identity.³²

Although the millet system in the Ottoman state is a result of its multiethnic and multi-religious character, it can still be said that it turns into a generator for its disintegration. What is even more frightening is that the millet system is becoming a generator for the development of Balkan nationalism because the cultural and ethnic identities of the groups in the empire have been neglected for centuries in favor of the religious ones.

The forcing of a religious identity resulted in an attempt to hegemonize the Hellenic identity over the entire Orthodox population, which led to the rejection of the non-Greek Orthodox population in the Ottoman state, and thus the beginning of its disintegration.

³⁰ Renner, K. (2005). *State and Nation*, in E. Nimni, *National Cultural Autonomy and its Contemporary Critics*, London; New York, Routledge

³¹ Smith, A. (1999). *Myths and Memories of the Nation*. New York: Oxford University Press.

³² Karpat, K. H. (1982). *Millets and Nationality: The Roots of Incongruity of Nation and State in the Post-Ottoman Era*, in B. Braude and B. Lewis (eds) *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, New York and London: Holmes & Meier.

The disintegration of the empire itself is due to the ethnic awakening of the various groups that inhabited its territory; different ethnicities began to show intolerance not only towards the central government in Constantinople, but also to the religious authority that secretly tried to impose Hellenism as the only identity solution of the entire Orthodox population in the Ottoman Empire.

It is for these reasons that Ottomanism can be defined as a classic successor to Byzantinism, as the Ottoman rulers unknowingly hegemonized Hellenism over the entire Orthodox population through the Ecumenical Patriarch. Namely, similar as in the Byzantine Empire from the period of the Palaiologos Dynasty (1259-1453), the hegemony of Hellenism contributed to the disintegration of the state, in this case of the Ottoman Empire.

The Ottoman Identity – Ottomanism

The Ottoman identity is the most complex form of identity that has ever existed in a country. Namely, when it comes to “Ottoman” identity, it is not meant as a normal national identity, but as a mixture of religions, cultures and languages that are not united naturally but administratively by the sole ruler of the empire.³³

Another interesting phenomenon concerning Ottoman identity is that it began to emerge after the conquest of Constantinople by Sultan Mehmet II in 1453. In fact, when we talk about Ottoman identity, we are not talking about a unified national identity; rather, from the point of view of the liberal³⁴ theory of nations and identities, it is an administrative identity that unites only the legal-political and economic framework in the country.³⁵

Religious unity for all Muslim subjects of the empire was fostered by the establishment of the Sunni way of practicing Islam as the official state religion by Sultan Selim I in 1517. That is when he conquered the Memeluks in Egypt and with this victory, usurped the title of caliph of Islam. Proclaiming himself as the caliph of Islam, Selim I not only gave legitimacy to the Ottoman dynasty to rule the Muslims in the world,³⁶ but also tried to create a kind of unification between the various Muslim groups in the empire such as the Turks, Persians, Arabs, Azeris and all other groups that had accepted Islam as the official religion until then.

³³ Itzkowitz, N. (1976). “The Ottoman Empire,” in Bernard Lewis, ed., *The World of Islam*. London: Thames and Hudson. pp. 277.

³⁴ Hutchinson, J. Smith, A.D. (1996). *Ethnicity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³⁵ Hobsbawn, E. (1990). *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Program, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

³⁶ Lewis, B. (1993). *Islam and the West*. New York City: Oxford University Press.

Ottomanism as a divided identity was inherited from the Seljuk Turks. After conquering a large part of Asia Minor, as well as parts of the Caucasus, Iran, and the Middle East, the Seljuks after the battle of Manzikert in 1071 realized that the population living in this territory would not be so easily identified with the newly imposed Turkish identity. For that purpose, the Seljuks accepted the Byzantine way of imposing imperial power through religion, emphasizing the importance of the Islam in the daily functioning of their state. However, due to the fact that in those territories lived a population that could not fully identify with either Islam or Turkish culture, they began to create the so-called administrative identity that in many ways is similar to the Byzantine imperial one.

This administrative identity was later taken over by the Ottomans, who, like the Seljuks, realized that only through the state apparatus could create a kind of identity through which all subjects in the empire would be identified.³⁷

Two things are characteristic of this Ottoman identity. The first one is that it is constructed on the basis of Sunni Islam as a unifying element of the Muslim population in the empire. This means that no matter how much the other non-Muslim communities in the empire were respected, the imperial bureaucracy never regarded the non-Muslim population as an integral part of the empire.

This kind of interpretation can be supported by the fact that everyone except the Muslim millet were excluded from the construction of the Ottoman identity in the country. This means that as early as the 16th century, the Ottoman government, both imperial and bureaucratic, began with the construction of an artificially structured identity in the empire that would aim to unite the Muslim population, but also to differentiate the same from other non-Muslim groups in the empire.

This way of forming a state-regulated identity provided the basis for later divisions and conflicts between the Balkan ethnicities.³⁸ In fact, by practicing a state-constructed identity as Ottomanism is constructed, it has provided the basis of today's Balkanism.

The second characteristic that is crucial in the construction of Ottomanism is the language. Language is one of the basic characteristics of each identity.

Wanting to unite the entire Muslim population in the country, the elite in the Ottoman Empire through the imperial apparatus created an Ottoman-Turkish language which was a mixture of Turkish, Farsi and Arabic.³⁹

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Karpat, K. H. (1982). *Millets and Nationality: The Roots of Incongruity of Nation and State in the Post-Ottoman Era*, in B. Braude and B. Lewis (eds) *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, New York and London: Holmes & Meier.

³⁹ Lewis, B. (1993). *Islam and the West*. New York City: Oxford University Press.

However, after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, this Ottoman language failed to remain the official language of present-day Turkey.

The Ottomans never took the Western way of determining their identity and nation. This normally could not have happened naturally because the Ottoman Empire was a multi-confessional and multiethnic empire in which no identity could be imposed as a unifier for all the millets in the country.⁴⁰ What the Ottomans really wanted to achieve was the hegemony of the so-called Ottomanism which is analyzed above in this text. By hegemonizing Ottomanism, as well as its Islamic character, the imperial government wanted to achieve the greatest possible inclusion of the population, or at least of the Muslim one.⁴¹

The modernization of Ottomanism began in the first half of the 19th century, with the coming to power of Sultan Mahmud II and later his son Abdulmajid I. These reforms, known in the Ottoman history as Tanzimat, in terms of identity mean transformation of Ottomanism from a religiously constructed and state-implemented identity that referred only to the Muslim population in the country, into a new Ottomanism that has a civic concept — that is, the creation of an identity with which all the subjects of the Sultan would be identified.

The civic Ottomanism that stems from the Tanzimat is in fact nothing more than the last attempt of the Ottoman emperor to prevent the collapse of the empire. Namely, after the secession of Greece in 1832 from the empire, the extension of a civil Ottomanism was nothing but an attempt to persuade the other ethnicities in the empire to consider themselves as part of the state, and thus to reduce the possibility of uprisings for independence in both the Balkans and the Middle East.

Tanzimat was in fact the last attempt of the Ottoman sultans to save the empire from collapse. Although this was impossible, the desire to survive still made these two progressive and liberal Sultans to concede that the millet system did not build Ottomanism, but only destroyed it. Namely, the millet system worked great in the Middle Ages when, with the help of military force, the ethnicities and religious groups were kept peaceful within the borders of the Ottoman Empire,⁴² while imposing a hegemonic religious identity over their ethnicities and a religious one that was constantly underestimated despite the Ottoman identity. The last attempt to restore historical Ottomanism was during the reign of Sultan Abdulhamit II, in order to prevent secession of Bulgaria, Serbia and Romania due to the intensified movements for national freedom.

⁴⁰ Lewis, B. (2002). *What Went Wrong: The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East*. New York: Oxford University Press. pp. 18-20.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Lewis, B. (1993). *Islam and the West*. New York City: Oxford University Press.

In any case, Ottomanism as an identity actually originates from the predecessor empires— the Byzantine Empire or the Eastern Roman Empire.⁴³ As the successor of Byzantinism, Ottomanism contributed to the creation of that pejorative Balkan nationalism, later defined as Balkanism. Thus, Ottomanism with its imperial and hegemonic approach, similar to Byzantinism, contributed to the discord or non-identification of other Balkan identities with the state or the administrative identity. As a result, if it can be said that by hegemonizing the Hellenistic identity as superior to the others, Byzantinism led to the collapse of the empire, it similarly can be said that Ottomanism contributed to the birth of the conflict of identities among all Balkan ethnicities.

Balkanism: An Ottoman Heritage

Unlike European nationalism, Balkan nationalism contains some elements that are unique to the region. This kind of nationalism such as today's Balkanism actually accumulates⁴⁴ symbols and myths not only of an ethnic but also of a religious nature. With this in mind, it can be said that Balkan nationalism accumulates the ethnic and religious attributes in order to create a nation of a certain group. This way of accumulating religion in the identity is the result of more than 400 years of Ottoman rule in the region.

If we look at the history, as well as what was written above in this text, we can conclude that the millet system created by the Ottomans, and which functioned until the middle of the 19th century, contributed to the penetration of the religion deeply into the identity features of all Balkan groups. This means that in the Balkans, religion becomes a feature of ethnicity that is later transformed into a national identity, not vice versa⁴⁵ as in Europe. Unlike the Balkans, in the rest of Europe, ethnic groups are embodied in the religion. In the Balkans, on the other hand, the religion is a part that determines and, to some extent, directs the development and improvement of the identity of ethnicities.

After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the formation of independent nation-states in the Balkans, an interesting situation arose in which all states, once formed, began to create a national identity that would be different from that of its neighbors. Thus begins the creation of the state-regulated nationalism which through the unified bureaucratic-educational system in each Balkan country aims to form generations that would boost their identity in relation to other neighboring identities.

This phenomenon of Balkan nationalism or Balkanism can be said to be the result of the Ottoman way of governing.

⁴³ Karpat, K. H. (2002). *Studies on Ottoman Social and Political History: Selected Articles and Essays*. Boston, Leiden, Köln: Brill.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Smith, A. (1999). *Myths and Memories of the Nation*. New York: Oxford University Press.

By not paying attention to the ethnic character that is specific to each group, but rather by emphasizing the common religion of all Orthodox Balkan ethnicities, the Ottomans created a hegemonic status of the Hellenistic identity in relation to the Slavic identities in the Balkans. Through the Greek language and the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Ottomans managed to rule the Orthodox population in the region.

The problem arises at the moment when the Slavic ethnicities, no longer able to tolerate the rank of a subordinate people in relation to the Greeks in terms of culture and other ethnic features, begin a struggle for independence. The struggle for independence of all Balkan peoples from the Ottomans is justified as a cause. What cannot be justified is the fact that in each of these struggles, nationalism feeds on a certain group which would have the task of distancing its own group from the others by raising on a pedestal its own landmarks.⁴⁶

So, by emphasizing the collective memory of their own group, as well as the myths of the same, the Balkan peoples during their struggle for independence managed to create fertile ground for discord on ethnic grounds with those with whom they were neighbours and good friends until yesterday, living in the same empire. And when the question arises: what has the Ottomans got to do with it? The answer is very simple: by denying the ethnic cultural identity and separation of the ethnicities following the example of Byzantine Empire,⁴⁷ the Ottoman Empire hegemonizes the Hellenistic identity through the Orthodox religion.

Although this hegemony is probably unconscious and in order to more successfully hold on the Orthodox population in chains, it can still be said that the Ottomans by modifying the Byzantinism managed to create Ottomanism that makes the foundation for today's Balkanism.

Hatt-ı Hümayun, or the Reform Act of 1856, is a document passed by the Ottoman ruler that guarantees equality to all the subjects in the empire on the basis of ethnicity, culture and religion. Hatıhumayun is actually the end of the millet system in the Ottoman Empire. However, when this reform act was passed, the division between the ethnic groups in the empire was so great that even its entry into force and its respect from the ruling elites would not prolong the life of the Ottoman state or reduce the tensions between the Balkan peoples.

Moreover, Serbia and Greece were already independent states and exerted a great influence to change the identity values of the Orthodox population that still lived within the empire.

⁴⁶ Каракасиду, А. 2011. *Полиња жито, ридишта крв*. Скопје: Магор.

⁴⁷ Conev, B. (2018). *The Byzantinism as Fundament of the Balkanism* in (2018) *Hiperboreea Journal* vol. 5, num. 1. Bucharest: Balkan History Association. pp.17-32.

In fact, the cumulateness of identity and nationalism in the Balkans comes to the fore once again when, through the religious schools, the various Balkan states sought to create new values for the Slavic population in the Ottoman Empire.

Another element of discord is the language and its use in the period when the Balkan peoples lived within the Ottoman state. The use of the Greek language by the Patriarchate of Constantinople, as the only language that recognizes Orthodoxy as a millet in the Ottoman Empire, is a huge blow to the identities of the Balkan ethnicities. This is in fact a direct favoring of Hellenism and degradation of the local identity because through language the identity of a certain group is strengthened. The favoring of the Greek language by the Patriarchate, with the approval of the Sultan, leads to a state of repulsion towards Greek culture by the Slavic population, which by itself generates a conflict of identities which contributes to the development of the specific Balkan nationalism.

It can be concluded that if the Byzantinism is the basis of Balkan nationalism — that is, it is the core of what is called the hegemony of one ethnic identity in relation to others in a multinational state — then it can be said with certainty that Ottomanism is only a prolonged phase of Byzantinism that does not lead to the current situation in the region.

When we say “situation” in the region, we mean the ethnic and religious intolerance that was created in the early Middle Ages and is constantly nourished throughout history, thanks to the specific past of all ethnicities that inhabit the Balkans. In any case, what can be concluded is that Balkanism was not invented in the 20th or the 21st century. In fact, Balkanism runs as a thread throughout the history of the ethnicities that live in this territory and does not leave them the opportunity to reconcile with the fact that they have a common past and the same or similar myths with which they are embodied. Balkanism is the moment of discord between these groups when the same heroes and myths from the collective memory are celebrated in different ways, and they cannot be reconciled that, thanks to the common past, the heroes and myths have entered the collective memory of all the groups in the Balkans.

Ottomanism, on the other hand, is the transition from Byzantinism to modern Balkanism which, by favoring the religious over the cultural and ethnic affiliation, manages to enable the ethnic groups in the region to no longer distinguish themselves from their past and reject nationalism as a future. Although Ottomanism is just fiction, as such it has contributed to today’s divisions and disagreements between the Balkan nations as well as to the ongoing conflict of identities.

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