Capricious Borders: Minority, Population and Counter-Conduct between Greece and Turkey

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Although the study of borders has always been central in disciplines such as Geography and International Relations, in the past few decades an analytical shift has taken place in social sciences aiming to move beyond dominant conceptualisations that focused on borders as predominantly geo-political entities with a central role in inter-state relations. In this new direction, borders have been re-theorised, for instance, as materialities (and materialisations) of state-building, nationalism and the production of ethnicity and 'otherness' but also as sites of resistance, contestation and affect. Demetriou's 'Capricious Borders' makes an important contribution to such discussions while it extends and interrogates them by shifting attention to the relations between borders and processes of 'minoritisation'. The focus here is on the Turkish-speakers of North-eastern Greece (Western Thrace), who live close to the border between Greece and Turkey and whose minoritisation is traced back to the Treaty of Lausanne (1923).

The book is an anthropological study based on long-term fieldwork in Gümülcine – as it is called by the Turkish speakers – and Komotini – as it is called in Greek –, one of the major cities in the Northeast of Greece. Demetriou conducted the main part of the research in the late 1990s through interviews, participant observation and meticulous archival research and she has followed up with subsequent visits to the area in the 2000s. She gives a very vivid image of what life 'in the margins of the state' involves through evoking accounts of places, buildings and individual stories, without ever neglecting to locate these in the broader picture of state-building, bureaucracy and politics in Greece. And even though anthropologists are not always passionate proponents of statistics and graphs, Demetriou demonstrates with the thorough analysis of her archive findings on historical patterns of land sales and marriage how such information can become an exciting and illuminating element of anthropological inquiry when it is skilfully integrated into the ethnographic narrative.

The central task of the book is to examine ways in which 'minority' is produced and conducted through its construction as a 'population' by state discourse and institutional policy-making. It is precisely this device of governmentality, which is highlighted by

Demetriou as an element that pushes us to think about state technologies (such as statistics, law and policing) also as technologies of biopolitics, that determine all aspects of individual life in the minority and become internalised and embodied – and therefore reproduced in the everyday. Minoritisation in this case is a process of subjectivisation that is enabled by the existence and the constant re-drawing of borders in the production of difference and 'otherness'. In this sense, the book not only looks at borders as material realities that produce and mediate particular spatio-temporal experiences but also as conceptual devices, therefore bringing together these two frameworks of analysis that have often been kept separate in border studies. 'Bordering' emerges as a central process here in the way exclusion and inclusion are imagined, narrated and enacted in state mechanisms of conducting the minority. But borders are not static; they have historically been drawn, re-drawn, lifted and re-consolidated, through processes of biopolitics that have often been shifting, inconsistent, arbitrary and contradictory. This is why borders deserve Demetriou's characterisation of 'capricious'.

The technologies of governmentality utilised to control and manage the 'population' materialise the exceptional status of the minority; a group of citizens who are an anomaly in the homogeneity of the national self as articulated in national and state imaginaries. Through rich data and detailed documentation, the book traces the biopolitical applications and manifestations of such mechanisms in various contexts, including land transfers, naming, the politics of genealogy, marriage and state care. Each of the main thematics is covered in an individual chapter, but there is a very good effort to also show how much their combined study reveals about the totalising effect of state conduct on the everyday life of the minority; to the extent that such life becomes 'normal'.

We learn for instance about how legal frameworks and policies have historically affected the land-sale rights of the minority; the statistics show very clearly that although transfer of land from the minority to Greeks has been facilitated, the opposite has been rendered impossible. Shifts in the physical landscape in terms of residence and land ownership are extremely important to consider in understanding emplacement and displacement in an area like Western Thrace where topographical arrangements have been based on ethnic and ethnicising logics. Questions of genealogy are raised in state discourses and policies to evaluate who belongs and who is excluded. The chapter on genealogy focuses on the case of the Pomaks, 'a minority within a minority' as they are often called, who are at different points treated indistinguishably as 'the minority' (together with the Turks and Roma) or as a separate group whose origin and therefore the eligibility to be included is debated and contested – not only by the Greek state but by others within the minority too. This very point highlights one of the main arguments of the book; that while the minority is often homogenised in official discourse and state practices, in reality internal differences emerge and are negotiated constantly. In addition

to assuming 'ethnic' divisions between Turks, Pomaks and Roma, Demetriou's participants also distinguish themselves from other members of their 'community' through a number of binaries, such as 'modern/traditional', 'religious/secular' and 'urban/rural'. However these same individuals often find out that the ways 'state care' is administered at national and local levels necessitate membership in the minority if one seeks to have access to state services and rights. Such contradictions are highlighted in particular in the chapter on 'The Political Life of Marriage' and in discussions of women and the female body as sites of power tightly linked to processes of 'minoritisation'.

The fascinating discussion on naming (and re-naming) relates to all the themes discussed above, since, as colonial and post-colonial theory has highlighted, the right to (re)name often rests with dominant powers and having a name changed can produce displacement for the dominated even though they do not need to move. According to Demetriou, Greece has a long history of nationalising toponymies and Western Thrace was not exempted from techniques through which foreign-sounding areas, city, village and street names were hellenicised. The hellenicisation project has not been considered by its agents always as a re-naming practice; a lot of the new names reflected a re-claiming of toponymies that according to the engineers of the project have always been Greek. Komotini therefore, the Greek name for Gümülcine, has been used to reclaim the Greekness of the city, by those arguing that 'Gümülcine' derives from the Greek word 'Kumutziná' and dismissing other etymological roots of the word in Turkish. But only places that are included in the national symbolic landscape and topography are considered worthy of (re)naming and instances of 'non-naming' are also described and analysed; for instance, a large number of streets in the *mahalles* (the Turkish areas/neighbourhoods) rarely figure in state toponymic projects and have either only a Turkish name or no name at all.

However, the people who are the focus of this research, the Gümülcineli, are not passive inhabitants of conducted physical and social landscapes; a large part of the book is dedicated to the ways they respond to, negotiate and appropriate 'the minority condition'. Some of them prefer to call themselves Turkish to draw distance from the religious content of 'Muslim' and against the insistence of the Greek state to define the minority in religious terms; they speak against the homogenisation of the minority as one community, as discussed before; and they navigate the city being able to switch positions in Greek and Turkish landscapes and materialities, a process that is inventively termed by Demetriou as 'spatial bilingualism'. Not only borders, but people are also capricious, argues the book.

This capriciousness is traced and described in all chapters and in contexts where the technologies of biopolitics in Western Thrace are questioned, negotiated and counter-conducted by the Gümülcineli. It is refreshing that the author chooses to use 'counter-

conduct' instead of 'resistance', a concept that has occasionally been over-stretched in some anthropological work to include very diverse types of agency and has raised issues of 'ethnographic romanticisation'. What is particularly insightful here is the way that counter-conduct as a form of agency is captured not only in those moments when people actively engage in counter-argument or in the types of embodied resistance that come with one's ability to navigate spaces that are designed to be strange to her, but also in those moments where the subversion of state technologies comes out of interactions and experiences in the everyday. This is very well demonstrated in the example of Meral who gets into a 'Greek' taxi to take her to her *mahalla*. She uses the Greek name of the street assuming that this will help the taxi driver, only to hear back that he does not know the street. When her little son who is with her asks her about the conversation, the driver explains to him in Turkish and he then asks Meral if the street is in *Yeni mahalla* (using the Turkish name). Counter-conduct therefore in this example emerges as inter-subjective, as a product of interactions between different agents; the individuals, the landscape and the materialities that define everyday life in Gümülcine.

The book includes a number of such ethnographic snapshots of everydayness, and given the vividness and insightfulness they offer to the account, a reader may be left to desire some more. Demetriou explains in the introduction that the main participants in her research were twenty young Gümülcineli, a number of whom appear in various examples of counter-conduct. The author admits that she is often questioned about how typical these participants are vis-à-vis the rest of the minority; however, she argues against the rationale of 'the typical' that reproduces ideas of minority homogeneity and which she painstakingly tries to deconstruct. This is an absolutely valid argument, although some more biographical information of the protagonists of this book would help the reader not to decide whether these individuals are typical or atypical of an essentialised condition but to further understand whether and how they see themselves as such. A little more detailed life histories could have also thrown further light on some themes raised in the book; for instance, about the minority's transnational connections with Turkey, migration within Greece, the effects of educational policies and the experiences of unemployment and participation in the institutional politics of the minority and Greece.

These however do not detract from a book that is well placed to become an essential reading for anyone interested in the study of borders, minority rights, Greek-Turkish relations and politics in South-eastern Europe more broadly. Western Thrace is a region that is constantly undergoing political, spatial and demographic transformations and Demetriou already highlights in the conclusion and postscript new sets of questions that may guide future research. The increased securitisation of the Greek-Turkish border as a European border to control migration has changed to some extent the ways in which the border is discursively constructed and materially managed and the impact of such changes

on the lives of the minority merit further investigation; not least through continuities in the use of technologies of biopolitics traditionally applied to the minority and now targeted towards migrants, as Demetriou suggests. And although austerity-ridden Greeks have now also become subjects of similar devices of governmentality, it would still be important to further investigate the impact of the crisis on minority rights, administration, political representation and everyday life.

The relevance of the book for Cyprus studies can be highlighted in a number of perspectives. First of all, turbulent events of conflict and war in Cyprus have had significant effects on Greek state-policy and the everyday life of the Western Thracian minority, who have been trapped in what is described as 'the reciprocity problem' between Greece and Turkey – the minority becomes the target of retaliation for the 'enemy's' misachievements. The book in this sense invites more attention to transnational elements of the Cypriot conflict that have not always been adequately acknowledged in historical and political accounts. Moreover, as a Cypriot and someone who has also conducted research in Cyprus, Demetriou draws regularly on Cyprus as a comparable ethnographic context. Some of the technologies of the state described here, such as naming and bordering in the production of difference and 'otherness' will resonate with similar observations and processes in Cyprus helping therefore to identify continuities and disjunctures that will offer a better understanding of the Cypriot context. But the comparative value does not stop there; ethnographic work in Cyprus has demonstrated that although state practices on both sides of the island can be totalising and often deeply divisive, Cypriots, very much like the Gümülcineli, often negotiate, subvert and appropriate them – they are capricious too.

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