

Evaluation of Laura Brody's PhD entitled "Memories of an Aegean Borderscape"

The thesis fulfils all requirements of a successful PhD thesis. I recommend the PhD to be defended.

It was with great pleasure and interest that I read Laura's finalized work. Although our meeting took place under very special circumstances, the road she has travelled since then shows just how well she has found the keys to open the doors that would lead her to finalize her doctoral thesis. First of all, congratulations on your hard work and perseverance.

This thesis gives us an insight into the geographical, political and identity-related issues still at stake in post-Ottoman areas. This is even more significant when it comes to border areas that directly involve Turkey and Greece. This thesis is all the more valuable in that it enables us to move away from an overhanging perspective, all too often adopted when reading geopolitics and the history of political relations in the Mediterranean. It places us at the level of the territory, of the women and men who make it up, shape it, even through absence, feel it, represent it and draw it. It is therefore a thesis about diasporic experiences, about the links forged and maintained with a place, and about the individual and collective imaginaries that structure and nourish these links. But it's also a thesis about the tensions between affect, the sense of belonging, identity and what underpins it, and a place to which we no longer formally belong and/or which no longer belongs to us, a thesis about these in-between situations, these blurred zones. This is a nodal point of the consequences of nationalism as it has developed since the 19th century, and which the post-Ottoman world has since been confronted with, with its share of negotiations and violence.

Laura's thesis is built around a broad theoretical field, composed of several entries and developed from different perspectives, and a transdisciplinary approach that enables her to navigate through and draw on several disciplines. It thus borrows from work on borders, diasporas, identities and nationalism, and draws on the reflections of Lefebvre, Soja, Massey, Said, Scott, Halbwachs, Renan, Harvey, Harari, Gramsci, Geertz, Bhabha, Barthes and others. This diversity demonstrates both an ability to cross academic universes and to find in each of them the elements necessary for reflection. This is not without weaknesses, one of which, in my view, is important: a sort of disconnect between theoretical and conceptual reflection, essentially developed in the Introduction and the first two chapters, and the field materials that are returned to us in almost raw form in the rest of the corpus. We would like to see more articulation between theoretical and conceptual reflection and fieldwork.

Be that as it may, the thesis opens up some fascinating avenues for reflection. The issue of hegemony and counter-hegemony, sense of belonging, questions the geographer in me on spatial and temporal scales, and on methodological issues. To what extent can we contrast a national scale, a state and its official ideology, rooted in a territory, with what has become a diasporized cultural minority? Is it enough to start thinking from 1923 without taking into account the island's local history before that date? While it's important not to fall into essentialism, local particularities must be taken into account. What, then, can be said about the history of relations between the Greek population of Imvros and the Ottoman authorities prior to that date?

Moreover, even if Laura does raise this question, it seems essential to interview the island's Turkish inhabitants. We might be surprised to see how this category, a priori shaped by Turkish nationalism, could in its own way interrogate the island's sense of belonging and identity from its own island and border experience.

Finally, in order to avoid falling into the trap of particularism and essentialism, two investigative approaches could be taken in comparison with the one carried out in Imvros: one on an island under Greek sovereignty whose Turkish inhabitants were marginalized and/or expelled after 1923, thereby balancing the investigative approach and turning the spotlight on this period and its consequences in a Greek nationalist context that mirrors Turkish one; the other on a Greek island also subject to the pressure of tourism, but developed by Greek economic actors, questioning the identity of a territory but without hiding behind the trappings of political culturalism to anchor itself more firmly in a more structuralist reflection.

All in all, congratulations once again on this fine work, and I wish you all the best on the waters of the Mediterranean.

P.S.: a reading tip: Orhan Pamuk, *Nights of the Plague*.

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