

♦ Panikos Panayi ♦



# *Outsiders*

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**A HISTORY OF  
EUROPEAN MINORITIES**

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*A History of European Minorities*

Panikos Panayi

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# *Contents*

Maps	vii
Preface	ix
Acknowledgements	xi
1 Minorities, States and Nationalism	1
2 Dispersed Minorities	17
3 Localised Minorities	63
4 Post-War Arrivals	117
Notes	161
Bibliography	185
Index	199

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## *Maps*

1	The Arrival of the Gypsies in Europe	21
2	The Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries	23
3	The Mongols in Europe during the Thirteenth century	25
4	German Settlement in Russia during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries	27
5	Russian Expansion into Asia, 1800–1914	34
6	The Growth of the Habsburg Empire	36
7	Cyprus after the Turkish Invasion of 1974	53
8	Loss of German Territory after the Second World War	57
9	Sami Inhabited Areas	66
10	Expansion from Moscow, 1260–1904	70
11	The Soviet Deportation of Nationalities, 1941–1945	73
12	The USSR	75
13	West Friesland	83
14	Geographic Location of Minority Languages in France	85
15	Location of Minorities in Spain	87
16	Geographic Location of Minority Languages in Italy	88
17	National and Ethnic Distribution in Yugoslavia	94
18	Swedes in Finland	96
19	Ethnic Composition of Inter-War Czechoslovakia	99
20	Expansion of Rumania, 1861–1920	102
21	Greeks in Albania	105



22	The Vlachs	110
23	Kurdistan	113
24	Population Movements, 1944–51	128
25	Bilateral Labour Recruitments Existing in 1974	142
26	Cross-Border Population Displacements in the Caucasus Region	155

## *Preface*

This book does not claim to be a complete history of minorities in Europe. To write such a history in a couple of hundred pages is unrealistic. Instead, it aims at explaining why minorities exist throughout the continent at the end of the twentieth century.

*Outsiders* identifies three different types of minorities. The first consists of dispersed groupings: people, united by religion or way of life, moving into and across Europe throughout the continent's history who have always felt themselves as minorities. They include both Jews and Gypsies. Secondly, there are localised groupings, whose origins again lie outside Europe, but who could remain largely anonymous until the growth of national states in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Thirdly, since the end of the Second World War, Europe has witnessed a mass migration of people across its borders, into already existing nation states, where the newcomers immediately find themselves outsiders.

Minorities may ultimately represent imagined groups, controlled both by the nation states which wish them to conform and by leaders within the minorities. Nevertheless, *real* differences certainly exist between ethnic minorities and majorities within individual states. The distinctions between ethnic majorities and minorities have, throughout European history, revolved around three characteristics in the form of appearance, language and religion.

The state, especially the nation state during the modern period, has had a central role in perpetuating the differences between majorities and minorities. Throughout European history, those in control of power have pointed to differences between in-groups and out-groups and have discriminated in favour of certain sections of the population. Ideology has always played a central role in this process. If in the middle ages it was based on religion, in the modern age nationalism has taken its place. These ideologies have served as justification for the implementation of policies which favour the majority at the expense of the minorities. The result of such policies has usually included legislative exclusion and often outright persecution resulting in killings. While Jews and Gypsies are obvious victims, very many others have suffered throughout the centuries.

At the time of going to press the themes covered by this book grip the international media's attention as NATO bombs Serbia in an apparently humanitarian attempt to help the ethnic Albanian Muslims of Kosovo. This group, with its own language and religion, shared by its Albanian neighbours, but not by Serbs, could remain anonymous in the Ottoman Empire, the system under which it developed. However, various forms of nationalism, especially Yugoslav during the 1990s, has made the Kosovo Albanians minorities and victims, like countless other groupings during the twentieth century.

Panikos Panayi  
London, 1 April 1999

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## *Minorities, States and Nationalism*

### *Types of European Minority*

The long history of settlement within Europe has meant that there exists today within the continent as a whole an enormous variety of minorities. These minorities consist of those who were indigenous before 1945, many of whom moved into or across Europe hundreds of years before the twentieth century; and immigrants, migrants and refugees who settled in a new area after the Second World War. These minorities have become distinguished from dominant groupings by a wide variety of characteristics, whether religion, as in the case of the Jews and Balkan Muslims; language; allegiance to another state; or way of life, as in the case of Gypsies. There are three main categories of European minorities: dispersed peoples, localised minorities and post-war immigrants. All have the basic characteristics of constituting small numbers within a particular state, distinguishing themselves through appearance, language or religion, and having limited political power. They have, collectively, evolved as minorities over the course of periods varying from decades to centuries.

The dispersed European minorities themselves can be divided into four groups. The first of these, the Jews, already lived in Europe during the classical period and gradually moved west and north over subsequent centuries. Gypsies appeared in eastern Europe, originating in India, from about the twelfth century and, again, moved west and north. These two minorities have always been outsiders throughout European history, both before and after the age of the nation state. Slightly different are the two dispersed groupings, the Germans and the Muslims, concentrated in the eastern half of the continent. The former moved eastward from a variety of areas of core German settlement from as early as the tenth century, continuing throughout the middle ages and beyond. By 1919 they found themselves living throughout the newly created states which followed the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires, but especially in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and Rumania. Muslims moved westward into eastern Europe, from further east in their case, as a result of encouragement by the Ottoman Empire. Like

the Germans, they found themselves as minorities in the new states which followed the collapse of the great European empires at the start of the twentieth century. A significant difference between Muslims and Germans is that the former include the descendants of indigenous peoples who converted to Islam following the Ottoman invasions of Bosnia, Bulgaria, Cyprus and Greece.

The other major category of indigenous minorities are those localised to small areas of Europe or to individual states. These people, with their own economic, social and cultural values, have become ethnic groupings because of state creation and extension in areas where they live. Good examples of such minorities include the Celtic fringe in Britain, essentially subjects of an expanding English kingdom; the Sami people, who retained their differences despite the continual northward movement of the Scandinavian states from the middle ages; and the peripheral peoples of Russia and the Soviet Union, who remained distinct from an expanding empire.

Another type of localised minority has been created by the process of state creation through unification. In such a situation a dominant culture emerges, usually that of the group which played the leading role in the birth of the new state. State creation has occurred throughout the course of European history. Examples have included the unification of Spain in the fifteenth century, the creation of Italy and Germany during the nineteenth, and the formation of Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia at the end of the First World War, each of which created minority groups. Numerous localised groupings simply represent victims of boundary changes, resulting especially from the peace treaties which concluded twentieth-century conflicts, especially the First and Second World Wars. In such situations the fate of peoples in particular areas was far less important than the other concerns of the victors. Such minorities have existed particularly in central Europe and the Balkans: for instance, Hungarians in Rumania and Greeks in Albania. A few minority groups remain within the heart of particular nation states. Good examples of such peoples include the Vlachs, who live in various Balkan states, and the Kurds of Turkey. The main characteristic of such peoples consists of the fact that they came second in the development of ethnic consciousness, which has meant that they find themselves trying to form their own political structures, as in the case of the Kurds, in the historical heart of particular nation states. In the case of the Vlachs political consciousness has not taken off.

Migrants, immigrants and refugees make up the majority of post-war arrivals. No other fifty-year period in the history of Europe has seen as much immigration as has taken place since 1945. The entire continent has been affected at some stage either by taking up population from or by surrendering

people to another part of Europe. Population movements in post-war Europe fall comfortably, though not perfectly, into three phases. The first covers the years immediately following the end of the Second World War and includes the population movements during the initial years of peace, which particularly affected the areas which the Nazis had controlled. The tens of millions of people on the move included victims of Nazism, in the form of foreign workers used by the German economy and former inmates of the camp system; German expellees from the victorious and vindictive regimes which followed the defeat of the Nazis; and victims of Stalinism, attempting to escape from that particular system of totalitarianism, but in many cases forced back by the agreements of the Allies at the end of the war.

The second phase of European migration, which ended in the early 1970s, essentially represented the search for labour supplies to act as fodder for the expansion of the European economies. Those states with colonies, notably Britain, France and the Netherlands, had obvious supplies of labour, but they also used workers from the European periphery, as did Germany and Switzerland and virtually all the rest of north-west Europe. Push factors played a subordinate role in this second phase of migration because the determining factor in causing population movement was the initiative of business and industry in the receiving state. However, in a number of states, including Turkey and Italy, the government of the sending society pursued a policy of exporting population as part of a solution to domestic overpopulation and underdevelopment. Tens of millions of people migrated to western Europe in this period. In the eastern half of the continent a few foreign workers moved to the German Democratic Republic, while millions of people migrated within the Soviet Union, especially Russians who moved to the Baltic Republics and Central Asia, partly in an attempt to develop the economies of those regions.

The third phase of post-war European migration, from the middle of the 1970s, involved several contradictory developments. First, the slamming shut of doors by the western European industrial democracies on migrants from all over the world. Secondly, an increase in the number of people who actually wished to move towards the wealthy parts of western Europe, especially following the political changes caused by the Cold War and its end. Many of the countries on the Mediterranean periphery, which had previously experienced emigration, now found themselves acting as importers of migrants from eastern Europe and North Africa. At the same time, the fact that the European Union allowed free movement of labour meant that many nationals of Italy, Greece, Spain and Portugal could now move into north and western Europe without the necessity for labour transfer agreements previously required.



### *The Definition of Ethnic Minorities*

Four factors contribute to the existence of ethnic minorities, revolving around the issues of size, geographical concentration, difference and power. All of the minorities which exist in contemporary Europe possess each of the above characteristics, to some degree, and have done so throughout their history as minorities. A perfect minority, for the sake of argument, is smaller than the majority grouping, is concentrated in a particular location or number of locations, looks outwardly different and lacks power vis-à-vis the dominant population.

Paradoxically, in numerical terms it is sometimes possible for a 'minority' to constitute a 'majority'. The existence of the Apartheid regime in South Africa, with blacks outnumbering whites, represents the best example of such a situation. While this is not true in any contemporary European state, minorities often outnumber majorities in particular locations within individual states. Clearly, Scots and Basques outnumber English and Castilians within Scotland and the Basque land, but not within Spain or Britain. At the other end of the spectrum, Gypsies in eastern Europe and post-war immigrants, even though they tend to congregate in particular locations in towns and cities, always represent minorities wherever they live.

Congregation in particular locations plays a major role in the existence of minorities. This allows intermarriage and the consequent perpetuation of ethnically 'pure' members of a particular population, as well as the development of ethnic organisations in areas where a market exists for them. Once individual members of a group move outside an area of such concentration it becomes easy for them to lose their ethnicity, either by marrying a member of another group or by participating in the activities of the dominant population and consequently finding themselves sliding towards assimilation.

The existence of minority groupings rests fundamentally upon ethnicity and the differences consequent upon it. The origin of the word ethnicity lie in the Greek word, *ethnos*, which simply means nation. No difference exists between an ethnic group and a nation, in the strict sense of the meaning of the latter word of applying to a group of people with shared characteristics. This relates equally to immigrants, dispersed groups and localised minorities.

An ethnic minority shares one or more of a number of characteristics in the areas of appearance, language and religion. Appearance represents the most controversial signifier of difference, usually referring, at a fundamental level, to physiognomy or skin colour. Clearly, in the cases of Arab, Asian and Black immigrants in contemporary Europe, there is no doubt that they look different from the fairer settlers who have lived on the continent for

thousands of years. Similarly, it would be dishonest to claim that, for instance, no difference exists in physical appearance between most Germans born in the north German plain and most Turks born in Anatolia. Historically, appearance has also played a central role in distinguishing one group from another in Europe. One of the fundamental contrasts between the Gypsies who arrived in Europe during the middle ages and the already established populations lay in the much darker skin colour of the newcomers, who had originated in northern India.

It would be wrong, however, to suggest that any group in Europe has a claim to absolute ethnic purity. The constant population movements during the whole course of the continent's history, and the intermixing of peoples which has taken place, makes this impossible. Just to take the example of the Germans, this group did not exist until the end of the first millennium. Similarly, to claim that all black or Asian people constitute the same ethnic group simply because of the colour of their skin would be an absurdity. Only racists would make this claim; or, contradicting them, anti-racists, who have developed black ethnicity as a reaction against the slurs of racists.

The appearance of groups also manifests itself in other ways, notably dress, which once again makes recent newcomers far more conspicuous than the old-established populations of Europe. A middle-aged Muslim woman in a Parisian street in the middle of summer, wearing her traditional dense clothing, is clearly different from a scantily clad, twenty-year-old, fair French girl. Yet dress may not signify very much in distinguishing two groups long-established in Europe, say Basques and Castilians, especially in an urban environment.

Food, which can be regarded as another aspect of appearance, also differentiates one ethnic group from another. The variation is greater between Europeans and post-war arrivals from overseas. It would again be difficult to distinguish between the diets of two long-established populations: living next to each other they have usually developed similar cuisines often involving a mixing of both traditions. Religion plays a role in the diet of many European ethnic groups, most notably Hindus, Jews and Muslims.

Appearance, encompassing dress and food, represents a basis for difference, but neither dress nor food are built upon to any great extent by ethnic ideologues. This cannot be said to hold true of language, perhaps the most important basis for the development of political ethnicity. Indeed, we need to recognise the fact that all modern literary languages are artificial constructs of the age of industry and nationalism. Preliterate societies communicate in dialects which thousands rather than millions of people speak. The act of creating a literary language in a particular area destroys the sum of its parts. Such an action represents a move towards a politically based

ethnicity: no group can regard itself as a nation unless it possesses its own language. Once this has happened, led by the literate middle classes of a particular area, they can force the government of a state to grant them language rights, which can encompass everything from prescribing road signs in their literary language to enforcing its use in education.

While language is central to the claim of most ethnic groups wishing to describe themselves as distinct entities, religion is only slightly less important. It may have represented an act of standardisation in centuries past when the major religions first developed, but attending a religious service in many parts of Europe today is the most important way for members of some groups to display their difference from the dominant population in the state in which they live. For some minorities, notably Jews and Muslims, religion is and always has been more important than language, as many members of minority religions have spoken the tongue of the populations which surround them, most notably in the Balkans. However, other ethnic groups also differentiate themselves by their religion in some way or other from the dominant population. This is especially true of immigrants into Europe who have brought to the western half of the continent religions which hardly existed there before 1945, notably Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. In other instances, notably Northern Ireland, historically evolved religious adherence forms the basis of difference, although in these cases religion has often been superseded completely by politics, to the extent that religion has little to do with ethnic identification other than in a symbolic sense.

Several basic differences clearly exist between European peoples and form the basis of ethnicity. However, we need to ask how consciously individuals, as opposed to groups, feel these differences. There can be no doubt that an immigrant who moves to any part of the world in any historical situation will notice the differences between his former place of residence and the surroundings in which he finds himself. In post-war Europe this is true of middle-class immigrants, moving from one industrialised state to another; but it is especially true of individuals who migrate from a Third World village to a large western industrialised city. Quite simply, they have moved from one world to another, surrounded by different buildings and different coloured people wearing strange clothes, living in a cold climate, speaking a language which they usually cannot understand, eating different food, practising a different religion and being involved in economic activities with which they have no familiarity. They may be traumatised or terrified, an experience shared by millions of immigrants into all parts of post-war Europe. Such people are profoundly conscious of their difference and greatly value the opportunity to use their own tongue with people of their own sort, one reason for ethnic clustering. The practice of their own religion in such a

time of obvious spiritual need plays a large role in the continuance of religion in the new environment, so that the newcomers put great value on the construction of temples or churches. For such individuals the continuance of their traditional way of life, no matter how mutated it may become in their western surroundings, is a question of psychological survival.

It may theoretically be possible for a member of a long-established minority group to have no consciousness of his difference from the dominant population. Such a person, surrounded by people who speak his own dialect, might not come into contact with members of the dominant population. In view of the spread of education, transport and nationalism, this innocence is unlikely virtually anywhere in contemporary Europe. Indigenous minorities almost always represent a direct contrast to immigrants in the sense that they only become conscious of their difference when the dominant grouping, with its exclusive nationalist ideology, moves into their area. This is brought about in a variety of ways. The spread of literacy, for instance, is often in the language of the nation state in which a particular people lives. This gives rise to demands for minority language provision in schools. The spread of a national culture also makes a local population realise its difference, because of the difficulties it has in relating to images on a television screen or to information in a newspaper. The arrival of transportation can also have an effect, as it allows outsiders to move into an area, whether as administrators or as workers. In such situations, the local population becomes conscious of its difference.

In other instances, especially in the case of dispersed minorities, awareness of difference has existed for centuries. In the case of Jews for over two millennia, due, above all, to the perennial persecution which they have faced. This has reinforced their distinctiveness rather than done anything to lessen it. Similarly, Gypsies in post-war Europe are deeply conscious of their difference: both because of their distinct food, clothes, religion, language, occupation and residence patterns, and because of the hostility which they have faced from standardising nation states.

Ethnicity becomes an issue when people are faced with new situations, either because they themselves have moved into an area; because a dominant national ideology has encroached on their space; or because they face outright hostility from the populace and government in a particular state. In essence, ethnicity is a reaction to these new situations. Food, dress, language and religion do not represent differences except in a situation in which other people do differently. Only then do people become conscious of their difference and only then can political ethnicity develop.

Ethnicity becomes conscious and politicised following a series of developments. In the first place, a culture develops, springing from a literary language,

which leads to books, theatre and music. In the case of the long-established groupings this process dates back over centuries, in the case of Jews even longer. Political ethnicity becomes possible with the backing of an ethnic media and the stereotypes which it perpetuates, developments which have taken place during the past two centuries. In many parts of Europe this encompassed the development of newspapers in the language of groupings in specific areas, such as the Basque land and Catalonia. Such groups may also develop a national myth through their media, even though they do not have their own nation states. In other instances, such as that of Gypsies, the lack of literacy or of any fixed settlement has hindered the development of political ethnicity.

In the modern period participation in the political process represents the most developed level of ethnic consciousness. Activism can take a variety of forms. Amongst immigrants it can simply consist of bodies campaigning for the rights of a particular group within the country of settlement. For indigenous minorities, the development of full-blown nationalist organisations represents at least a desire for autonomy and, usually, independence. Numerous examples of such bodies exist throughout Europe, including the Scottish National Party, the Vlaams Block, ETA and Sinn Féin.

### *The State and its Ideology*

To numerical inferiority, geographical concentration and ethnic difference, we need to add lack of power. Where minorities control the state, they become the dominant grouping. The relationship with the state represents the axis around which all other aspects of minority and majority relationships revolve. The group which controls power imposes its own culture and ideology upon those perceived as different.

Minorities usually lack power not only politically but also economically. If they had economic power, they would probably control the state. In the overwhelming majority of European states, economic and political power have gone hand in hand throughout history. Newly arrived immigrants, Gypsies and peripheral groupings such as the Lapps represent examples of peoples who have neither political nor economic power. Nevertheless, the equation is not always so straightforward, as there are contemporary and historical examples of minorities with economic power. In the case of the Basques and Catalans, vis-à-vis the Castilian centre of Spain, their advanced economies have played a fundamental role in the birth of ethnic consciousness in their respective regions. Similarly, in post-Holocaust Europe, those Jews who survived Nazi brutality have proved themselves better educated and wealthier than members of the dominant groupings. In much of western

Europe this was also the case before the Holocaust; it represented one of the main reasons for hostility towards Jews.

Nevertheless, as a dispersed minority, Jews have never controlled political power in individual European states, even though those prepared to assimilate through the ages have secured positions of authority. Ultimately the group which controls political power represents the one which decides which sections of the population make up the insiders and which make up the outsiders.

While ethnic minorities have existed throughout European history, even though they may not always have been recognised as such, the minority populations which exist today do not all have an equally long history. On the one hand, Jews and Gypsies have represented minorities throughout their centuries long presence on the continent, in the former case because of their religion and in the latter due essentially to their appearance. Similarly, when immigrants moved into or across the European continent after 1945, they instantly became minorities because of the presence of already existing states, which had often played a large role in their importation. On the other hand, localised groupings, together with dispersed Muslims and Germans, have not always existed as minorities, even though they may have resided in a particular location for centuries. To take the example of the Kosovo Albanians. As a Muslim population they actually represented a privileged group under the Ottoman Empire; but, with the formation of Yugoslavia at the end of the First World War, they became a minority in a state essentially controlled by Serbs and, to a lesser extent, Croats. In this case, the rise of South Slav nationalism played a central role in the birth of a Kosovo Albanian minority.

This general point needs expansion. While some minorities have existed as such throughout European history and others have not, at the end of the twentieth century all peoples in Europe form part of either a majority or a minority. A difference exists between the modern nation state, with its all embracing ideology and control, and all the forms of government which preceded it: tribal, monarchical and imperial. In all of these there remained some possibility of anonymity for minorities. In the modern nation state no such opportunities exist.

To begin with tribal society, which existed in Europe a thousand and more years ago. In such societies the concept of minorities simply did not present itself as an issue. In the first place, tribal societies seldom had people with different ethnic characteristics within them, as separate tribes tended to keep themselves apart. Furthermore, the lack of any advanced culture or state organisation meant the absence of a sophisticated xenophobia which victimised minorities, even though primitive hostility towards other groups

certainly existed in particular situations. The Angles and Saxons forced the already resident Celtic population towards the fringes of the British Isles, although to claim that this affected all 'native' Britons is questionable, because intermarriage certainly took place. One of the major characteristics of the tribal period was indeed the relative freedom of movement in an age before state control. The ethnic groups which were to emerge in Europe, either as nation states or the minorities within them during the modern period, had found their areas of long-term residence by the sixteenth century and in many cases hundreds of years before that.

It is the emergence of centralised states that makes the presence of minorities conspicuous and a problem; in some forms of government more than in others. Empires, as well as monarchical states, represented a fairly loose form of control within the European continent. They played a central role during the course of Europe's history, controlling vast tracts of land from the time of the Roman Empire, in its various forms, to the demise of the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires. All of these ruled over extremely divergent ethnic populations. The Habsburgs and Ottomans certainly had their favoured population groups in the form of German-speakers and Muslims respectively. In addition, they also carried out acts of persecution, especially, in the case of the Ottomans, during the period of conquest and in the final century of their empire. Yet the Ottoman Empire accepted difference as natural, especially in religion, the main signifier of ethnicity before the twentieth century. Residents living within the domains of the Habsburgs and Ottomans did not have a centralising culture imposed upon them because, in this loose and primitive form of organisation, literacy and technology remained limited. There were no mass circulation newspapers, no universal education and (of course) no television, each with its ability to preach the message of those in control in the form of a standardising nationalism. Consequently, in the agrarian non-technological societies and economies of the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires, different religious and linguistic groups could keep themselves to themselves barely conscious of their ethnicity, believing simply in their own God and striving to make a subsistence living. They recognised the existence of other peoples, but accepted the differences. They had no desire to eliminate them until nation states arose in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

While the empires of the Habsburgs and the Ottomans controlled much of central and eastern Europe for several centuries, a different situation existed in some of western Europe, with monarchical states controlling smaller areas. It has been argued that England was a nation state by the eleventh century at the latest, both because of the existence of an organised and effective government by the time of the Norman invasion and because