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# SPATIAL CONCEPTIONS OF THE NATION

## *Modernizing Geographies in Greece and Turkey*

EDITED BY

P. NIKIFOROS DIAMANDOUROS, THALIA DRAGONAS  
AND ÇAĞLAR KEYDER

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## Social and Historical Studies on Greece and Turkey

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These books provide a forum for Greek and Turkish social scientists and historians to promote academic dialogue between them and the wider, international community of scholars. Each volume focuses on a specific theme that reflects current academic debates on issues of major theoretical importance in the social sciences. The aim of these books is to contribute to these debates through analyses based on the Greek and Turkish experiences.

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# Introduction

This book is the third in a series of collective volumes engaged in a transdisciplinary dialogue among scholars in Greece and Turkey on the intertwining histories of their respective societies. The passage from the multiethnic Ottoman Empire to the contemporary nation-states and the nationalist discourses accompanying the process constituted the epicentre of both previous volumes<sup>1</sup> and continues to dominate the present one. The first volume focused on state formation in Greece and Turkey and on dimensions of citizenship while the second examined the way the two countries experienced and reacted to modernity through their relationship with Europe.

In this third volume we tackle the primary concern of the nationalists: the elusive congruence between territory and people. Nationalist movements make states, but in circumstances they cannot control; then they strive to fill their accorded space with 'true' representations of the nation. The vision of an unadulterated purity that is almost achievable requires ethnic cleansing, expulsion, exchange of populations and forced conversions. 'Good' national subjects that remain are educated, regimented and 'made' in the desired image. But the space itself cannot be razed and moulded as readily. It has a history; it has features that cannot be ignored; its place names are full of signification; and its built environment reflects the prior presence of others. There are roads, buildings and monuments that have to be explained, transformed, ignored, or even made to disappear before geography can be made to look like a proper representation of new ideals. The travail of sovereign nationalism is difficult, full of tension and unending. Its goals change over time and the relative weights of its constituent parts are constantly negotiated. History, religion, language, blood and the state ideal alternately dominate as cohesive principle at different times. Allegiance to 'place' in its manifold layers would be a benign and less problematic alternative, but nationalisms strive to present themselves as based on essential and primordial features of the people. Even the least primordial nationalisms are loath to take space as the primary defining dimension of their mobilization. So, they devalue, disregard and even suppress the particularity of territory; states and politics

strive to make spaces into national (and shallow) places. Since nationalism has a variable correlative, the advertised projects marking homogeneity within the territory can never be achieved – competing (real or constructed) religious, racial or linguistic demarcations are often followed by the battle of political ones. But the desire to remake the space does not diminish and the struggle continues, also because nationalists always imagine more exalted (and expanded) geographies that incorporate ancestral lands, ethnic brethren, historical legacies; even divine promise.

The chapters in this volume address such issues of geography and nationalism, space and place, reality and project in the context of Greece and Turkey, two states where the conceptions of territory and population, allegiance and nationhood, religious versus secular, ethnic versus constitutional principles have been in constant tension. The spatial construction of both states was the result of wars and negotiations at diplomatic tables – nothing ‘natural’, given the attempts to naturalize territory in the political ideology of the nationalists. But, of course, the administrative apparatus of the nation-state took over the territory with the intention to untangle, simplify, homogenize and establish the rule of the generic. Richness of the particular was a threat. There were, nonetheless, competing projects: for some, the shared Ottoman heritage and its promise of an alternative route to modernity still held a promise. Others invested all their commitment in the nation-state, but argued about the exact texture of the stamp that would be imprinted on the space. In both Greece and Turkey there were difficult bargains with religion as a constituent of the new blueprint. Nationalist precepts overlapped and interacted with projects of modernity in establishing order and meaning. Their histories, constructed as the imperative of the nation-state, actively forgot and suppressed big chunks of the lived experience of the populations. Accordingly, spaces that could not be readily assimilated were relegated to oblivion.

The 12 chapters in this book are presented in three parts. The contributors to Part I set out the more general themes and present the historical background to the issues. They investigate the uneasy nexus between pre-national and pre-modern significations attached to place, as well as the modernizers’ and ‘nation-state builders’ attempts to instil in the population sentiments they deem to be appropriate to new times.

In their well-researched essay, Stouraiti and Kazamias approach the relationship between space and nation through a systematic and evocative examination of the Greek irredentist project of ‘the Great

## INTRODUCTION

Idea', seen through the theoretical lens provided by utopia conceived as an analytical concept. In so doing, they bring out in relief the ambiguous relationship between boundaries and nations in general, as well as the fluid conception of national space that so profoundly characterized the Great Idea. Their central argument is that the Great Idea constitutes 'a polyvalent notion' capable of accommodating four major and analytically distinct components: an irredentist ideology, a Western 'civilizing mission', an ethno-religious conception of nationhood and an imperialist project of reviving the Byzantine Empire. Building on this construct, the authors seek to demonstrate how the Great Idea constituted an expression of the nation-building process that regards territory as 'non-place'. In support of their argument, they point to the oscillation inherent in the very construct of the Great Idea between different conceptions of territorial boundaries (as seen from the various maps of 'Greek lands' produced over a period of more than a century), Greekness (ethnic versus ethno-religious criteria) and time horizons (the survival of the construct beyond the Greek defeat in the Greek-Turkish war of 1919–22).

Yonca Köksal deals with the period in Ottoman history when, through legal and political reforms and state modernization, attempts were made to create a modern administrative framework within the empire. Reforms during the second half of the nineteenth century led to the construction of new social spaces in rapidly growing cities, which permitted urbanity to open up the relatively closed quarters of the ethnic communities. Paradoxically, however, legal equality and shared public space strengthened ethnic networks and prepared the ground for nationalist movements. This was true especially in the commercial spaces of port cities where communities invested in schools and cultural activities, and created a national, and eventually separatist, momentum to rival the modernization attempts of the Ottoman state.

The challenges associated with managing the transition from an Ottoman to a Greek conception of territory, as understood and promoted by the Bavarian regency's 'ideology of rupture', constitutes the subject of Tsiomis's essay. Central to his analysis is the attempt by the Bavarian regency, led by Georg Ludwig von Maurer and enthusiastically assisted by a motley crowd of Saint Simonists and other reformers, to use Greece as a gigantic laboratory in which to engineer multiple ruptures with the Ottoman past and to construct a modern state patterned after contemporary Western European conceptions. The ambitious blueprint espoused by these visionary reformers included the construction of ports, canals, a road network and thriv-

ing bourgeois cities to replace Balkan-type towns. Industrialization would be nurtured and physical space planned to render possible the resettlement of plains, the strengthening of agriculture and the commensurate thinning of the mountain populations. Their ultimate aim was the wholesale modernization of Greek society and economy and the literal creation of a state equipped with all the trappings of modernity. Its eventual failure to materialize was not so much the result of a flaw in conception as of the difficulties associated with radically different realities 'on the ground'.

In a discussion on church and state borders in the wake of the wars between 1912 and 1922 Anastassiadis addresses two realities: on the surface, he examines the political stresses and strains associated with the effort to bring about a three-way realignment of borders involving an expanding Greek state, the Church of Greece and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Istanbul. At a second and socio-logically fascinating level, however, he traces the impact of these momentous political changes on the various populations living within the contested territories and seeks to shed light on the slow and often tormented process through which pre-modern identities, based fundamentally on religion, were gradually superseded and replaced by initially diffuse but eventually crystallized attachments to the nation-state. Especially interesting is the author's description of the stillborn efforts to enable the Patriarchate to assume a broader role in the international religious scene and of how the Catholic Church and the Vatican strenuously and vigorously opposed this initiative. The final solution, which emerged in 1928, proved the Patriarchate's capacity to use its centuries-long experience in dealing with powerful imperial states to arrive successfully at an arrangement accommodating its interests with those of the modern nation-state.

Asim Karaömerlioğlu explores one of the possible routes that Turkish nationalism could have taken. In the early years of the Republic, before the 1930s turned to ethnic nationalism, there was a current of thinkers who took the new country's geography more seriously than the eventual winning version of nationalism would, and infused the Anatolian heartland with a significance deriving from its unique relation with Islam. Although influential, the secular and ethnicist nationalism of the day eclipsed their views. Nonetheless, their vision remained a powerful ingredient of later versions of the Turkish state's official ideology, which tends to employ both secular and religious motifs in a pragmatic compound.

Nur Yalman's chapter is an evocative catalogue of the prevailing malaise in Turkey, a country where material welfare brings anxiety

and where identity battles rage in the political arena. Impositions of the state tradition preclude a proper negotiation with the Ottoman heritage, with Islam and the diversity of cultures that the country has inherited as the heir to the rich geography that successive empires commanded. Official discourse prohibits an honest consideration of ethnic and confessional diversity; and history textbooks are still being constructed over a foundation of silences. Ongoing debates reflect the waning power of the state elites who traditionally depended on their gate-keeping powers to perpetuate their status, but it is not clear if their challengers will succeed in proffering an alternative that will manage to calm the waters of these identity debates.

Two chapters on Cyprus comprise Part II, not to foreground the island's complex standing as an issue of contestation in national space but because what has been going on in the island over the last half century replicates, in smaller geographical scale and with considerable delay, some of the themes we attempt to highlight in this volume.

Yael Navaro-Yashin writes about how the Turkish occupation geographically reconfigured northern Cyprus. This is an effort in which nationalists everywhere periodically engage: place names have to be 'cleansed' to eradicate any traces of the pre-history of national space. In her rich ethnography, she describes the contours of this attempt in northern Cyprus, where the memory that is being erased is fresh in people's minds. Land surveying was one of the modern state's early practices; it seems to have given way to magical thinking as officials systematically rename the fields and villages while their populations carry on with their lives. Navaro-Yashin describes how the political practice of renaming places leads to a reaction by native Cypriots who contest this imposition by continuing to use the familiar names.

Mavratsas seeks to highlight the complex and contorted way in which space and nation, in the form of geography and history, have historically interacted in the case of Cyprus. Inspired by Elie Kedourie's work on nationalism, he draws a theoretical distinction between three types of national identity. Geographical or territorial national identity is based on geography and is essentially defined in opposition to history, 'which is considered irrelevant or passé'; geo-historical national identity is the happy product of a harmonious symbiosis of geography and history; and, in historical national identity, where he squarely places Cyprus, history trumps geography, the latter often being regarded as an impediment to the realization of nationalist aspirations. Mavratsas argues that the construction of Greek-Cypriot national identity on the basis of this third type has meant that key features of Cypriot geography, such as proximity to Turkey and

the long presence on the island of a sizeable Turkish-Cypriot population, have been systematically disregarded or ignored. The result of this historical development has been a nationalism mired in the past with inherently problematic processes of national integration and territorial consolidation.

Part III consists of four chapters on specific geographies – those of Thrace, İzmir, Antakya and Istanbul. Its authors describe the interplay between narratives about these cities and provinces, and the life-worlds of their inhabitants, which have been rooted in the material concreteness of social relations in space.

Konortas's rich and densely written essay constitutes yet a further examination of the intricate and politically charged interplay between nascent nationalism, fluid collective identities and space, which characterized the emergence of competing nationalist projects in Southeast Europe during the long century leading to the final demise of the Ottoman Empire. Focusing on the conflicting scholarly constructs that Greek, Bulgarian and Turkish nationalist historiographies produced, the author carefully dissects the claims this literature puts forward, critically assesses its openly apologetic character and subtly analyses the public policies underpinning it. In so doing, he pays particular attention to the concerted efforts all players in the field made through what he calls the 'wars of maps, statistics and schools', systematically to deny and suppress the 'ethnic other'. The author argues that the overlapping conceptual boundaries of terms such as 'Greek', 'Rum', 'Bulgarian', 'exarchist', 'patriarchist', 'Turk', 'Pomak', and 'Ottoman' can be traced to lingering social and political problems that continue to bedevil the domestic politics of the successor states of the Ottoman Empire more than 80 years after its demise.

Agelopoulos makes use of analytical categories derived from his discipline, social anthropology, to explore the interplay between nationalism and scholarship. He seeks to do so by focusing on a particularly interesting but little known aspect of the Greek-Turkish War of 1919–22, that is the Greek administration of occupied İzmir's attempt to establish a School of Ethnology at the University of Smyrna. His analysis brings into sharp focus the political and scholarly dilemmas of Greek policy makers who tried to obtain an in-depth understanding of the religious, cultural and linguistic characteristics of the various populations inhabiting the new territories that Greece acquired as a result of the Balkan wars and the First World War, while ensuring their integration into the enlarged Greek state. He highlights the concerted efforts an enlightened Greek leadership made to produce a curriculum seeking to transcend narrow nation-

## INTRODUCTION

alist discourses in an attempt to understand and confront the dilemmas of otherness at a time when the unfolding collapse of an ancient empire was releasing multiple and powerful nationalist forces throughout southeast Europe.

Reşat Kasaba's chapter is about the history of a belated land acquisition in modern Turkey. The Antakya province (Hatay) was not within the borders defined by the post-First World War armistice; it was incorporated into the country as the result of a not totally above-board deal with mandatory France, in 1938. Hatay province, and especially the city of Antakya were anomalous also because a certain cosmopolitan richness was maintained there despite raging nationalism elsewhere in the country. Multi-confessional and multilingual, the population seemed to live without conflict and at peace with its heritage, demonstrating to the rest of the country an untapped possibility. It is no accident that Antakya is now a favourite destination of domestic tourism in search of a multicultural past, and one popular TV drama takes place there to celebrate the city's difference.

Istanbul, of course, has always been a huge problem for a nationalist redefinition of Turkish geography. It is Byzantine, Ottoman and colonial, Christian, Islamic and cosmopolitan. Despite the huge growth of its population due to relentless migration from Anatolia, it is as far from purely national as can be imagined. Now that the global economy rewards the marketing of the city in all its multifaceted historical treasure, the Justice and Development Party, governing the municipality since 1994 and the country since 2002, has had to capitulate to the exigencies of tourism and mobile capital. In her textured account, Ayşe Öncü narrates the strategies employed by the urban coalition spearheading the global exhibition of the city. Through this window, the Ottoman past becomes an object of negotiation between competing political narratives. While the motifs that are utilized in the campaigns create exalted images of the past, they also define, in practice, new constituencies and, therefore, new contours of exclusion.

The contributions to this third volume of 'Social and Historical Studies in Greece and Turkey' make use of the accumulated social and historical experiences of these two countries in an effort to contribute to ongoing debates within the international social science community of scholars working at the intersection of history, politics and culture.

The Editors





# PART I

## IMPERIAL REALM TO NATIONAL LANDS



# 1

## The Imaginary Topographies of the *Megali Idea*: National Territory as Utopia

*Anastasia Stouraiti and Alexander Kazamias*

I see you before me at last, oh Borders,  
I see you and I jump up and fly to the clouds,  
I feel for you such craving in my heart,  
That I want to eat you together with this paper.

Oh paper Borders, I gaze at you before me,  
And I cry, I cry, I cry like a little child.<sup>1</sup>

(Giorgos Souris)

The Greek inhabitants of the so-called kingdom, as well as those living in the Ionian Isles under British rule consider it, of course, to be their national mission to expel the Turks from wherever the Greek language is spoken. ... They may even dream of a Byzantine restoration although, on the whole, they are too astute a people to believe in such a fancy.<sup>2</sup>

(Karl Marx)

The political vision which became known as the *Megali Idea* (Great Idea) was the dominant concept of Greek official ideology from 1844 until at least 1922.<sup>3</sup> In its basic form, this ideal envisaged the extension of the borders of the young Greek state to include all the Greek subjects of the Ottoman Empire. According to Ioannis Kolettis, the politician who first coined the term on 14 January 1844, the Greek state was only a part of the whole of Greece, which included 'not only someone who lives within this kingdom, but also one who lives in Jannina, in Salonica, in Serres, in Adrianople, in Constantinople, in Trebizond, in Crete, in Samos and in any land associated with Greek

history or the Greek race'.<sup>4</sup> Although the *Megali Idea* is usually perceived as an irredentist programme calling for the national unity of all the Greeks, from the beginning the concept was linked to visions of imperialist grandeur.<sup>5</sup> Of the territories claimed in its name, there were always some where the Greeks formed only a minority, including Istanbul itself, 'the great capital' as Kolettis called it, of a future Greek state that amounted to a revived Byzantine Empire.<sup>6</sup>

Besides its fluid character as both an irredentist and an imperialist notion,<sup>7</sup> the *Megali Idea* was also ambiguous in several other respects. Its criteria about who should be defined as a Greek, at least until the formation of the Bulgarian Church in 1870, were not purely ethnic, but rather ethno-religious, drawn from the Ottoman concept of the Rûm millet, which placed all the Orthodox populations of the Empire under the leadership of the Greek-speaking Patriarchate of Constantinople. Another uncertainty surrounds the timing of its rise and fall. Although the term was first heard on 14 January 1844, the vision of a unified Greek state stretching across the Balkans was conceived nearly fifty years earlier by the republican revolutionary Rigas Ferraios;<sup>8</sup> and although it was officially abandoned after the Greek defeat in Asia Minor in 1922, fragments of the idea survived until the fall of the colonels' dictatorship fifty years later with the Dodecanese, Northern Epirus (southern Albania) and Cyprus featuring as the remaining Greek irredenta.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the territorial boundaries of the Greater Greek state were also shrouded in an aura of mystery. In 1907, the politician and intellectual Ion Dragoumis noted in his diary that there were three main geographical visions of this ideal state: 'the concept of a small Greece whose borders [are those] of ancient Greece. ... A greater Greece with the City [Constantinople] as its centre, [seeking] to recreate the Byzantine Empire. ... [And] a Greece whose borders are those of the Greek race.'<sup>10</sup>

Contemporary historiography on modern Greece is familiar with the vagueness of the *Megali Idea*. K. Th. Dimaras describes it as a concept with an uncertain outline; Antonis Liakos refers to its alternate variations; Elli Skopetea stresses its indefinite character and Nicos Svoronos calls it a fantasy-like notion.<sup>11</sup> Difficulties, however, begin to occur when the nature of this vagueness is being analysed. Skopetea, for example, relates it to what she calls a contradiction between the certainty that the idea will be realized and the 'knowledge that the Greek state was unable to do anything to promote it'.<sup>12</sup> Dimaras and Llewellyn Smith have divided the concept into three different versions or strands – one envisaged the regeneration of the Byzantine Empire; a second called for the 'transfer of Western education to the

East'; and a third, the most dominant in their view, saw it as an irredentist ideal aspiring to unite the Greek nation under a single state.<sup>13</sup> Others, like Paschalis Kitromilides, contrasted the content of the term to its function: 'although external greatness ... provided [its] ideological and rhetorical underpinnings', its aim, he argues, was to provide domestic unity between 'the nation and the Church'.<sup>14</sup> Beneath all these interpretations, however, lies a common analytical problem that is none other than the exaggeration of the vagueness of the *Megali Idea* to the point of denying it all intellectual coherence and autonomy from the meanings given to it by its various exponents.

It is hereby contended that the treatment of the *Megali Idea* in such negative terms, that is, as a concept lacking a unified and autonomous meaning, emanates from the failure of the relevant historiography to grasp its utopian character. What is meant by this is rather straightforward: insofar as utopias are descriptions of 'imagined worlds, free from the difficulties that beset us in reality',<sup>15</sup> then the *Megali Idea* can recover its intellectual unity and autonomy through an analysis that stresses its fictional over its real elements. In other words, if we are dealing with a notion whose intellectual quality is primarily symbolic – and the *Megali Idea* has often been described as a dream<sup>16</sup> – it follows that we can make little sense of it if we continue to analyse it on the basis of its relationship to reality. All dreams and utopias do not stand up to the standards of the real, as they are made up of disparate fragments of reality that are joined together in a unified whole only in the realm of the imagined. Consequently, we can understand them better if we acknowledge that they refer to imagined worlds and begin to analyse them on the basis of the latent logic underlying their fictional manifestations. In this regard, the *Megali Idea* will be treated here as a polyvalent notion encompassing four main intellectual elements: an irredentist nationalist ideology, a Western civilizing mission, an ethno-religious concept of nationhood and an imperialist project of reviving the old Byzantine Empire, all unified in the same utopian vision of creating the state of Greater Greece (Μεγάλη Ελλάς).

This chapter does not merely intend to show that the *Megali Idea* was a utopian notion. While this is among its main objectives, its central aim is to put forward the proposition that, precisely because of its utopian character, the *Megali Idea* could never define the territorial space of the modern Greek nation in a fixed and specific form. On the contrary, what we are stressing here is that this notion was highly ambiguous about the geographical boundaries of the Greek nation and, by implication, about the borders of the future Greek state. Indeed, we go as far as to assert that the territoriality of the

Greek nation was historically founded on a nation-building process that saw territory as a non-place, namely in u-topian terms. To account for this paradox, we argue that the making of the Greek nation must be primarily understood as an open-ended project whereby the process of nation-building itself took priority over any plans envisaging its completion.

### **The variable territory of the nation**

The previous argument carries significant implications for the theories of nationalism and national territorial space, especially for their constructivist strand, which has come to dominate this theoretical field in the last two decades. In particular, it challenges one of its core tenets, which holds that 'nations cannot be conceived without a *specific* territory or homeland'.<sup>17</sup>

Although our emphasis on the utopian character of the *Megali Idea* follows the thrust of Benedict Anderson's definition of the nation as 'an imagined political community', we also share the criticism of this theory as one that is 'prone to idealism'.<sup>18</sup> As Thongchai Winichakul observes, 'Anderson seems too concerned with the imagination' and says little about the institutions and practices that turn the imagined nation into historical reality.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, however, we are also sceptical of Winichakul's own proposed remedy to this problem, which Anderson adopts in the revised edition of his book,<sup>20</sup> whereby the modern map is identified as the maker of the nation's territory. Our first reservation is that the map, as Winichakul defines it,<sup>21</sup> is no less of a mental construct than Anderson's imagined community, which he charges with idealism; and second, we find Winichakul's view of territory as a determining attribute of nationhood geographically reductionist. Overall, his conclusions from the study of modern Siam are of limited value in explaining processes of nation-building like that of modern Greece where no hegemonic map can be identified as the maker of national space.

In broader terms, constructivist theories of nationalism obscure the complex conditions under which the nation is first conceived and then constructed as a new socio-political and geographical entity. First, much of this body of theory assumes that traditional notions of empire gradually gave way to pure conceptions of modern nationhood when, in reality, until the mid-twentieth century most of Europe's old nations were still centres of large multinational empires and many of its younger nations still held imperialist ambitions.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, the *conflation of nationalist ideology and visions of empire* produced highly ambiguous mental maps in which the boundaries of the ideal state

were difficult to define. Second, constructivist theories paid limited attention to the forces of *external resistance*, which have obliged many nations to revise, negotiate or abandon parts of their originally imagined territorial space. (Ironically, external resistance has often come about from other nations whose own imagined territories overlapped with their own.) Third, this body of theory has also failed to acknowledge that the *varying levels of power and the diverse strategic choices* among the different agencies leading the nation-building process (the national liberation movement in pre-independence cases or the state after independence) tend to produce significantly altered perceptions of national space from one case to another.

For these reasons, it would be more helpful to reiterate Nicos Poulantzas's theory of national territory as a space that is neither clearly defined nor existing prior to the creation of the national society that inhabits it. As he put it,

frontiers and national territory do not exist prior to the unification of that which they structure: there is no original something-inside that has later to be unified. ... The state marks out the frontiers of this serial space in the very process of unifying and homogenizing what these frontiers enclose.<sup>23</sup>

Emphasis on the dialectical relationship between national society and the delineation of its territorial space derives partly from Poulantzas's thesis that 'territory is only one element of the modern nation' (along with history and language).<sup>24</sup> It also reflects his assumption that nations and the political agency that constructs them (in his case, the state) have a tendency to expand beyond their original borders. To quote him again:

Through that very movement by which it both marks out frontiers and unifies national space, the State also turns beyond those frontiers towards an irreversible, clearly demarcated space which yet has no end or final horizon. ... For to mark out frontiers involves the possibility of redrawing them: there is no way of advancing in this spatial matrix except ... through demarcation of an interior that is always capable of being extended *ad infinitum*.<sup>25</sup>

The crucial distinction here is between the nation's modern type of frontiers, which are cohesive, specific and impermeable and its territorial space, which is indefinite, abstract and open. At the heart of

Poulantzas's thesis lies a dual concept of modern borders as 'limits capable of being shifted'.<sup>26</sup> These borders fix insiders from outsiders in rigid terms but, since they can always be shifted outward at a future point, this inside and outside can be redefined all over again.

Exponents of the critical geopolitics school have more recently advanced similar arguments, stressing that 'territories should be understood as historically and socially produced entities which exist for a certain period'.<sup>27</sup> Among them, Anssi Paasi observes that after Finland's independence in 1917, 'the distinction between "natural" and "artificial" boundaries became important [to justify] territorial expansion into the "Finnish Lebensraum" of Eastern Karelia'.<sup>28</sup> This is one of many examples demonstrating that 'boundaries are not nearly as fixed, stable or uncontested as is commonly assumed' by students of nationalism,<sup>29</sup> because the possibility of redrawing them is always kept open. In nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Greece, the same perception was also shared among several advocates of the *Megali Idea* who made a distinction between the country's imperfect, temporary or narrow borders on the one hand, and its natural or historical lands on the other.<sup>30</sup>

To conclude these preliminary remarks, we must also point out that constructivist theories of nationalism are not in fundamental conflict with perceptions of national territory as an indefinite geographical space. Imaginary objects are always wrapped up in an aura of haziness and ambiguity and, insofar as nations are defined as imagined communities, it follows that their territorial space is also engulfed in an equally indefinite and volatile geographical vision. The emergence of the modern map and of clearly defined state boundaries during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries does not render this assumption invalid. To think otherwise would be to fall into what John Agnew calls 'the territorial trap': that is to take for granted the view that nation-states are always tied to a fixed and clearly bounded territory.<sup>31</sup> To put it differently, as long as state boundaries are capable of being redrawn, their appearance on the modern map as fixed and clear limits always carries with it an element of *artificiality* that renders them malleable and potentially adaptable to the volatile imagination of the nation. Consequently, there is no reason to assume that the replacement of the indefinite premodern boundaries by clearly marked modern ones has fully transformed the way in which nations imagine their territoriality.

### **Imagined communities as imaginary commonwealths**

Our argument so far can be summarized as follows: if modern nations are imagined communities, then these communities in space must be



defined as imaginary commonwealths, or else as political utopias. This conclusion is not original. Phillip Wegner recently argued that in several English texts, 'by the latter part of the nineteenth century, the link between the imaginary community of the utopia and the imagined community of the nation-state had become ... firmly established.'<sup>32</sup> What has been less obvious, however, is that the same link with utopia runs through the ideology of Greek nationalism and, particularly, its founding notion of the *Megali Idea*. For this reason, the ensuing paragraphs shall endeavour to demonstrate the validity of this claim.

We have already noted that, according to Skopetea, one of the most common ways of referring to the *Megali Idea* was to call it a dream.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, it would have been more accurate to say that in Greek nationalist discourse the two terms had virtually become synonymous. In a lecture on Kolettis in 1890, the lawyer Dimitrios Iliopoulos spoke of the late politician's 'sweetest dream' of embracing Jesus again inside the temple of St Sofia, while Gerassimos Vokos, in a play titled *I Megali Idea* (1909), makes his main character, Saviour, use the words 'idea' and 'our dream' interchangeably.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, the young politician George Papandreou spoke publicly in 1914 about the 'beauty of the dream', meaning the wide borders of Greece after its victories in the Balkan wars, and, in the same year, Ion Dragoumis described the *Megali Idea* as 'the Greek dream'.<sup>35</sup> A year later, Kostis Palamas also wrote verses about the Dream (with a capital initial), which 'phosphoresced onto the other side/to the peoples living under the black/shadow of the Haimos',<sup>36</sup> the mountain range in contemporary central Bulgaria. It suffices to note here that since Ernst Bloch's major contribution to the subject, utopias have been defined as intentional, collective and public 'dreams of a better life'.<sup>37</sup>

Theories of utopia also converge on the historical circumstances that give rise to these collective public dreams. Wegner explains that 'utopia appears in a moment of historical liminality' as 'a schematizing, or "preconceptual", way of thinking', to critique existing socio-cultural norms and to present a 'picture of history-in-formation' by highlighting 'transformations already under way'.<sup>38</sup> Louis Marin is more specific on the particular circumstances that give rise to such visions. 'The first phase of utopic discourse', he says, 'takes hold of ... an ideological contradiction', for example a blocked debate over the growth of theft in sixteenth-century England in the case of Thomas More's *Utopia* or the question of urban concentration in Iannis Xenakis's essay *La Ville Cosmique*. As neither side of the controversy can offer a solution, utopic discourse reverses the contradiction, he says, and then reinforces it by driving one side of the argument to its limit.<sup>39</sup>

The speech that gave birth to the *Megali Idea* was delivered under similar conditions to those outlined above. When Greece became independent in 1830–32, it was placed under the joint protection of Britain, France and Russia, which then appointed a Bavarian prince to rule it as an absolute monarch. On 3 September 1843, a popular uprising forced King Otto to grant a constitution and on 8 November a constituent assembly was formed to draft its text. In other words, when Kolettis gave his famous speech to this assembly on 14 January 1844, Greece was going through a liminal stage in every sense of the term: it had just acquired its first assembly since independence, its first post-independence constitution was being drafted and its first parliamentary elections were about to take place. At the same time, the country was in a state of flux; it had just experienced a revolution, an attempted coup, continuous post-revolutionary riots and a protracted electoral process that started with the elections for a constituent assembly in November 1843 and would resume with new elections in May–August 1844.<sup>40</sup>

Kolettis's decisive intervention, moreover, came during the debate on article 3 of the draft constitution, which dealt with the critical question of who should be defined as a Greek citizen. Dimaras informs us that 'a few days earlier, the relevant debate had reached a *serious deadlock*,'<sup>41</sup> following a motion by a number of delegates to differentiate the status of the *autochthon* from that of the *heterochthon* Greeks, that is the natives of territories belonging to the kingdom and those who came from territories still under Ottoman rule. As Richard Clogg explains, this conflict reflected a socio-cultural antagonism between the 'superior education and political experience' of the *heterochthons*, which led them to higher state positions, and the parochialism of the *autochthons*, who complained about the fat salaries and European manners of the former.<sup>42</sup> Kolettis, himself a *heterochthon*, did not join the debate just to defend the equal rights of Greeks from outside the kingdom, but did it, as Marin would say, to reverse the terms of the debate and press the case to its limit: rather than to argue whether the *heterochthons* should be admitted as equal citizens in the Greek kingdom or not, he told his audience that it is the kingdom itself that ought to extend its borders to include them. In other words, he reversed the terms of the debate from being about who should be allowed in the Greek territories, to whether these territories are acceptable or not. In pressing the *heterochthons*' case to its limit, Kolettis's intervention exacerbated the controversy; and while this did not help him win that vote, it gave him the fatherhood of a compelling utopian notion.

The form and content of utopias also present a number of recurring characteristics. Of those, the most common are:

- Discontent about the present and strong preference for an imagined future order;
- reliance on a selective narrative that normalizes all conflicts in the harmonious totality of this imaginary future; and
- an inward looking vision that ‘never admits anything exterior’ to the utopia itself.<sup>43</sup>

All three, as we shall see, have been prominent features of the *Megali Idea*. First, according to Christina Koulouri, a marked tendency of nineteenth-century Greek historicity was the ‘devaluation of the present and the impatient prediction of the future’.<sup>44</sup> Usually, discontent about the present was expressed through the juxtaposition of the inferior and corrupt Greek state versus the superiority and moral purity of the nation. ‘The Greek kingdom is not the whole of Greece, but only a part, the smallest and poorest part’, Kolettis said in his speech of 1844.<sup>45</sup> At his funeral three years later, the poet Panagiotis Soutsos spoke of the day when the Greek nation would rise ‘from the Cross of its narrow borders’,<sup>46</sup> while in 1851 the historian and statesman Ermannos Lountzis compared the ‘ephemeral present ... of our wretched individualism’ with the ‘boundless wonderful view ... of a Greek family including all its children’.<sup>47</sup> At the turn of the twentieth century, it was common to contrast ‘the failure of the Greek state’ with ‘the evident successes of the nation’,<sup>48</sup> while Ion Dragoumis would later develop a full theory to condemn the weak and parasitical Greek state as the nemesis of the nation’s life and potential.<sup>49</sup>

Second, in the imagined harmony of Greater Greece these and other conflicts instantaneously disappeared. For instance, all the military campaigns and violence required to obtain the claimed Ottoman territories were magically eradicated. When the French foreign minister François Guizot expressed concern that the *Megali Idea* might trigger a Greek-Ottoman war, Kolettis explained that this will not be necessary, as ‘the force of things alone’ will bring about its realization.<sup>50</sup> On another occasion, the professor of international law at the University of Athens Neoklis Kazazis defended the notion on the grounds that every state must seek its national integration ‘as long as it does not violate the sovereign rights of neighbouring states’!<sup>51</sup> The *Megali Idea* was also presented as a perfect bridge over Europe’s geopolitical and cultural divisions between East and West. Since Kolettis’s speech, a Greater Greece was portrayed as the centre of Europe<sup>52</sup> and a

channel of cultural transmission destined to enlighten the East with the values of Western civilization. Another tension that the concept miraculously resolved was the traditional local and regional rivalries inside the kingdom itself. Again according to Kolettis, the *Megali Idea* was capable of regenerating Greece in such a way as to absorb these conflicts 'into one state, one purpose and one power, one religion and, lastly, one constitution'<sup>53</sup> – what Lountzis later called a harmonious national wholeness (εθνική ολομέλεια).<sup>54</sup> The same views are also echoed in Ion Dragoumis's essay *I Megali Idea* (1908), which ends with the confident prediction that, through this ideal, 'the entire Nation shall become again a united, fine-looking and powerful state'.<sup>55</sup>

And third, the *Megali Idea* was also articulated in a distinctively monologic and self-oriented discourse that downplayed any fissures or ambiguities in the composition of national space. In the same way that it rejected all temporal discontinuities in the history of the nation,<sup>56</sup> its territory was also imagined as a continuous space with no gaps or disruptions by elements external to itself. Greater Greece was envisioned through an auto-referential, narcissistic rhetoric as a land owned and inhabited only by Greeks, while other competing ethnic groups were usually denied all existence. Neighbouring territories in which the Greeks were only a minority were invisible in this imagined homogeneous space. In two of the most important maps of Greater Greece, Rigas Ferraios's *Carta of Greece* (1797) and Constantine Paparrigopoulos's *Map of the Hellenic Countries* (1878), the Ottoman lands are presented as blank territories, empty spaces without a name or a people. These are what J. B. Harley calls cartographic silences, showing how maps suppress undesirable information and erase the presence of rival states;<sup>57</sup> but they are also manifestations of the detached and self-centred manner by which the *Megali Idea* projected itself.

Although utopias are descriptions of imagined places completely cut off from any surroundings, precisely because they are not real, their boundaries are also hazy and in a constant state of flux. In his article 'Frontiers of Utopia', Marin accounts for this paradox by drawing a parallel with the notion of the 'horizon' that signifies both a limit (also evident in the word's etymology) and its opposite, infinite space. He then concludes that 'utopia is the figure of the horizon': a vision of a landscape whose outline shows both a limit and limitless place. Marin contrasts the notion of the utopic limit with that of limits as conventionally understood. They are the opposite of one another. Conventionally, limits are lines that separate, whereas in utopia they have a fluid, equivocal image that merges the finite with the infinite.<sup>58</sup>

A number of historians have commented on the territorial outline

of the *Megali Idea*. Svoronos describes it as cloudy and one that made it 'difficult to determine the borders of Hellenism'; Artemis Leontis argues that sometimes it rendered a real geographical area with vague frontiers, and at other times even this 'material space recedes like a Platonic shadow'; and Shannan Peckham finds that 'the boundaries of this enlarged state were vague' and notes that a number of different Greeces began to appear when geographers started to outline its territory.<sup>59</sup> A revealing example of this equivocal perception of boundaries can be found in Santos Karidis's *Ode Ioannis Kolettis* (1847) where the Epirot politician is extolled for having shown 'the farthest Greek limits' (τα πέρατα Ελληνικῶν ορίων),<sup>60</sup> a verse reflecting with spectacular accuracy the image of utopian frontiers as both limits and limitless places.

### The imaginary topographies of the *Megali Idea*

What we have tried to establish so far in theoretical terms, we must now begin to demonstrate through empirical examples. In the ensuing paragraphs we shall therefore analyse a number of geographical projections of the *Megali Idea* as envisaged by some of its most influential exponents. Our examples begin with Rigas's Hellenic Republic in the late eighteenth century (mainly because Kolettis invoked it) and conclude with Venizelos's territorial calculations on the eve of the *Megali Idea*'s virtual demise in 1922. In the course of this analysis, we shall be focusing on two main questions: first, how each of these projections outlined the geographical boundaries of the Greek nation; and second, what similarities and differences emerge when we compare them to each other.

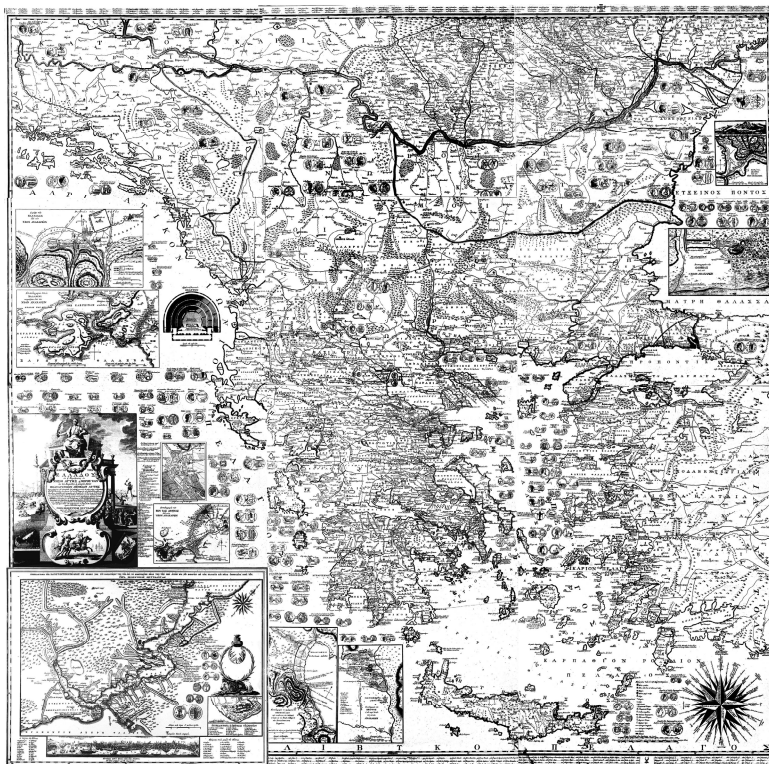
In his 1844 speech, Kolettis protested that 'we have distanced ourselves from that great idea of the fatherland which we saw for the first time expressed in the song of Rigas.'<sup>61</sup> When we turn to this song, however, we find that Rigas's *Thourios* outlines a geographical area that stretches from the edges of the Principality of Moldavia in the north (Silistra, Braila, Izmail, Kilia, Bendery, Khotyn) to Egypt in the south, and from the Black Sea and Syria in the east (Aleppo) to Montenegro and Malta in the west. This loosely defined space does not coincide with Rigas's multiethnic Hellenic Republic, which is defined in his *Revolutionary Declaration* of 1797 as an area including 'Roumeli, Asia Minor, the Mediterranean Islands, Wallachia-Bogdania and those who sigh under the discontenting tyranny of repugnant Ottoman despotism', a group that potentially encompasses all the Arab peoples from the Maghreb to Mesopotamia. Matters are further complicated if we try to imagine this state on the basis of Rigas's description in his

model *Constitution*: 'Whoever speaks the plain or Greek language and helps Greece even if he lives opposite ... is a Greek and a citizen', says article 4(vi).<sup>62</sup> It is therefore hardly surprising that the constitutional lawyer Aristovoulos Manesis has recently described this Republic as 'a non-viable cross-Balkan state'.<sup>63</sup>

Rigas's legendary *Carta of Greece with a Surface Plan of Constantinople*, a map in 12 sheets which he designed and printed in Vienna in 1797 (Map 1.1), does not outline the territories of this imaginary republic in any clearer terms than either his *Thourios* or his *Revolutionary Declaration*. The area shown on its surface adds in fact a third variation of Greek geographical space and, like the other two, its boundaries are equally vaguely defined. For example, the *Carta* does not show the six Moldovan cities, the Black Sea coasts, Egypt, Aleppo and Malta, which are all named in the *Thourios*, while Mediterranean islands like Cyprus and other Arab territories potentially covered by his *Revolutionary Declaration* are also kept out.

A striking feature of the *Carta* is the absence of any state borders except for one line marking the Venetian possessions in Dalmatia and another, which runs along the Haimos mountains, separating the regions of Moesia and Eastern Rumelia in contemporary central and southeastern Bulgaria. This minimal use of boundaries has led the historian of cartography George Tolia to observe that Rigas is not 'following the strong tendency (marking his era ...) to treat national formations as separate political and geographical entities',<sup>64</sup> adding that this is a rather curious choice for someone who championed the cause of national independence. To resolve this paradox, Tolia argues elsewhere that 'one of the unusual features about the way "Greek" space has been perceived during the modern era [is that] it was always part of a composite imperial pattern'; and Rigas's *Carta*, he continues, shows 'the superimposition of Phanariot territoriality' over the rest of the Balkans under a 'national idea [that] was not detached from the composite imperial idea of Byzantium'.<sup>65</sup> These conclusions are generally valid, but under one condition: the combination of national and imperial notions of territoriality in a single concept of space is possible only at the level of abstraction characteristic of utopic imagination.

Rena Stavridi-Patrikiou has remarked that Kolettis appropriated the legacy of Rigas to suit his own ideological aims.<sup>66</sup> This conclusion becomes clearer if we compare the respective geopolitical projections of their ideal Greek states. Kolettis's kingdom is more closely linked to a national conception of space than Rigas's multiethnic Republic. While both see Constantinople as its defining centre, Kolettis's geographical



Map 1.1. Rigas's *Carta of Greece with a surface plan of Constantinople*, Vienna 1797.

Source: *Ellinomnimon*, Digital Library of Greek Philosophical and Scientific Books and Manuscripts, Department of History and Philosophy of Science, University of Athens.

imagination does not stretch as far as Moldova in the north, or Egypt and Syria in the south and east. The six cities named in his speech form a continuous horizontal limit that starts from Ioannina in the west, passes through Salonica, Serres, Adrianople and Constantinople, and ends in Trebizond in the east. Despite this apparent clarity, it is still uncertain how far to the north of this line Greece's boundaries should stretch. A more obscure area lies between Constantinople and Trebizond, a coastal line of approximately 1000 kilometres that cannot be integrated into a coherent national territory. Kolettis, moreover, named the island of Samos as a landmark in the southeastern periphery of his imaginary state, but once again it is extremely difficult to see how the distance of 1200 kilometres that separates it from Trebizond could be linked in a geographically coherent national space.

The most ambitious attempt to concretize the territorial vision of the *Megali Idea* was carried out by Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos, a

friend of Kolettis as a young man, but better known as Greece's national historiographer from his seminal work, *History of the Hellenic Nation* (1860–76). In the late 1870s, Paparrigopoulos acted on behalf of the state-sponsored Society for the Dissemination of Greek Letters to produce a series of geographical maps outlining the so-called Hellenic Lands, an ambiguous term he used in his *History* to describe the various territories inhabited by Greek populations from antiquity to his time.<sup>67</sup> To this end, the Society for the Dissemination of Greek Letters hired the reputable German cartographer Heinrich Kiepert to design several maps, and Paparrigopoulos travelled to Berlin in 1877 and 1878 to discuss and oversee their production.<sup>68</sup> Of those, the ethnological *Map of the Hellenic Lands with the nearby Albanian, Slavic and Romanian [Lands]* of 1878 was politically the most important (Map 1.2). Its design, however, followed a debate in which the German geographer thought that ethnic distribution should be shown in different colours within every region, while the Greek historian coined the neologism 'ethnocratic' to argue that every region should appear in one colour showing the ethnic group that was numerically dominant.<sup>69</sup> Ultimately, Paparrigopoulos's will prevailed and the result was an impressive map showing for the first time with such accuracy the national territories of Hellenism.

At first, Paparrigopoulos's map gives the impression of having managed to convert the utopian vision of the *Megali Idea* to a clearly delineated geographical space. In many ways, the *Map of the Hellenic Lands* appeared to have created spatially what his *History of the Hellenic Nation* achieved temporally, namely to concretize through the use of scientific techniques the idea of a Greek nation that is perfectly united in both place and time. The key to this achievement lay in Paparrigopoulos's ingenious concept of ethnocratic mapping, a term that rationalized the utopian desire of national domination embodied in the *Megali Idea* to make it applicable in a practical way. Despite the doubtful accuracy of the censuses used and the deployment of a good deal of ethnic gerrymandering, the map appeared to fulfil the main scientific standards of modern cartography that were becoming established at that time: Greece was shown as a clearly bounded territory, surrounded by other nations whose territories were also clearly defined.<sup>70</sup> Above all, however, its authorship by a distinguished geographer like Kiepert provided it with proper authenticity and added scientific weight.

In reality, however, the apparent modernity of the *Map of the Hellenic Lands*, like its official authorship by Kiepert, was nothing but a superficial exterior. Beneath what by current scholarly standards would be considered a pseudo-scientific gloss lies the same ambiguous