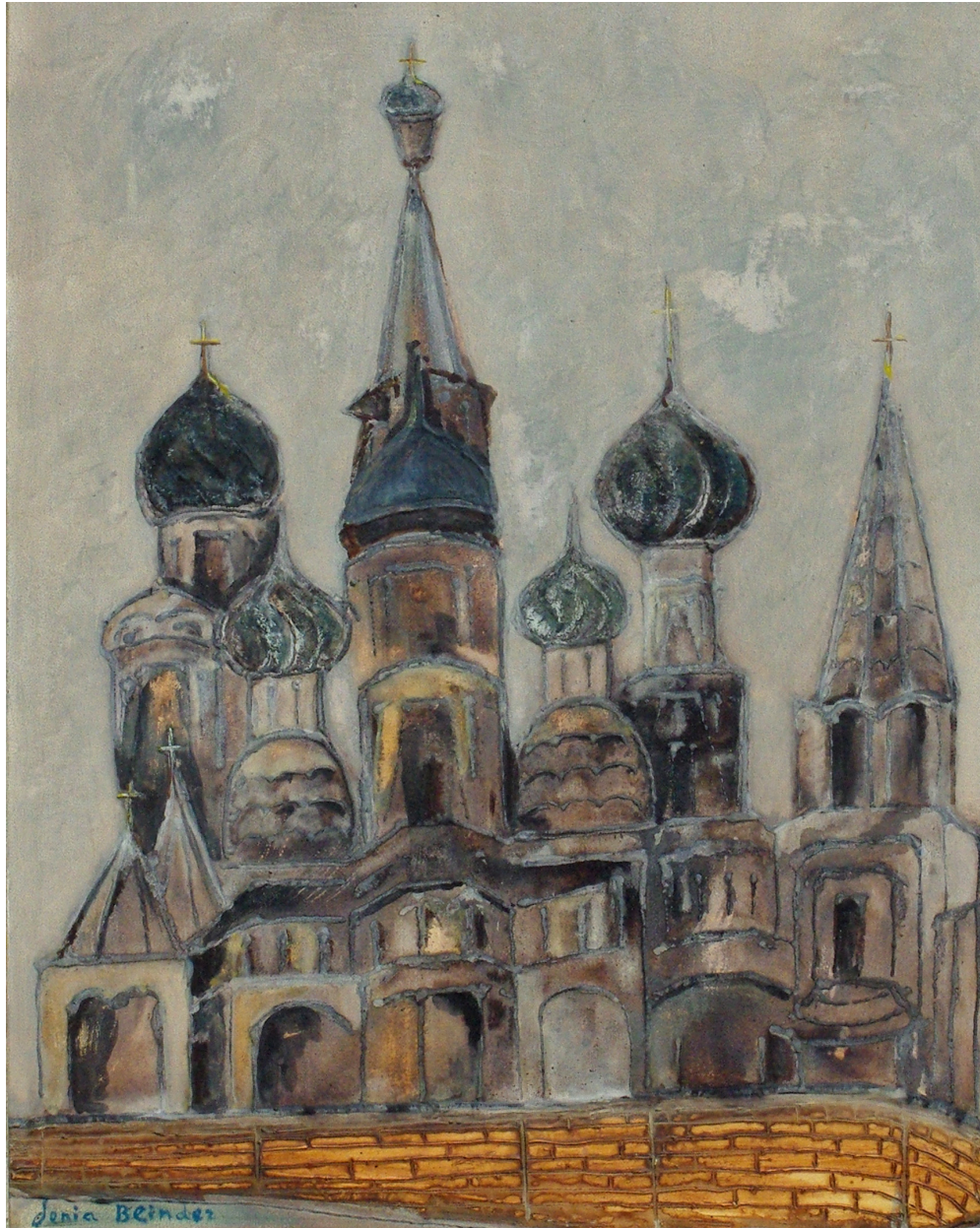


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Harris Mylonas, *The Politics of Nation-Building: Making Co-Nationals, Refugees, and Minorities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 273 pp. with 20 b/w illustrations, 11 maps, 20 tables.

Academic research also follows the waves of fashion, or, put more technically, the shifts in focus. Nations and nationalism

have been a major topic since the early 1980s, and the achievements in this area cumulatively created a number of theoretical breakthroughs toward our understanding of the infrastructural operations of modern states, as well as of the popular imagination and contestation emerging in reaction to the growth of bureaucratic state powers. Moreover, the new, more materialist, historical, detailed, and even soberer understanding of states, nationalism, and ethnic violence gained a remarkably broad acceptance. It may be said that we are all constructivists now (with a few notable exceptions, like the late Samuel Huntington). These new, or, in fact, no longer very new theories might be called internalist, because their focus is on what happens inside national imaginations, movements, and states. In *The Politics of Nation-Building*, Harris Mylonas shows the direction to which the next generation of researchers might turn. The newest direction might, at first, look quite conservative: it is bringing back great power politics into the discussion. But new fashion often returns us to what our grandparents knew well, does it not?

In fact, Mylonas opens his arguments with the poignant and touching story of his own grandparents. They came from the places now called Turkey or Russia and became proper modern Greeks only in the course of their complicated lives. Modern states surely played a key role in these micro-sociological human transitions. On the one side, the emerging Soviet Union or Kemalist Republic regarded dangerously suspicious the loyalties of certain populations, even despite their native and often sole fluency in the Russian or Turkish languages. On the other hand, the new modern Greek state, with its capital in Athens, fortunately, found these populations desirable, as putative Greeks who were yet to learn modern Greek language. Such personal stories would sound familiar to the readers of this *Yearbook*. But Mylonas is

not only a good historian, capable of conjugating the microlevel of everyday life with shifting macrohistorical structures. He also proves himself a virtuoso political scientist, capable of formulating fruitful puzzles and illuminating hypotheses where all might seem so painfully familiar.

Comparative method in historical social science dwells on empirical variation over time and space, and it operates with the more nuanced sliding scales, rather than the either/or oppositions. Here, this means finding for analysis the instances that contradict the common perception of the modern Balkans as a region of continuous ethnic cleansings and population exchanges. One such instance was the participation of Armenian parties in the Ottoman government along with the Young Turks in 1909. Mylonas goes to the archives (admittedly a salutary move for political scientists today) and systematically excavates from the files and old newspapers a whole range of such instances dating back to the first half of the twentieth century. Mylonas carefully avoids the automatic designation of outlier groups as minorities, problematizing this designation itself. It is analytically important to notice that the government and political elites of the Greek state decided not to regard as minorities Pontic Greeks or Russian-speaking families with somewhat Greek names and religious allegiances (an inevitably bulky but somewhat more precise description of the author's grandmother back in 1920). Even Greek-speaking Muslims from the Balkans at some point in history could be considered putative Greeks and, therefore, subject to assimilation rather than expulsion from the new nation. Archival materials allow Mylonas to expand his analytical range and consider a variety of what he calls "non-core groups," such as Gypsies, Sephardic Jews, Pomaks, various Slavs, ethnic Hungarians, and Germans across the whole Balkans region, when its borders and identities seemed so precariously unstable.

The result is a richly textured and compelling analytical narrative that supports the main argument of the book. To paraphrase the campaign slogan of an American president, it's great power politics, stupid!

Mylonas's main contribution is indeed to reintroduce what our grandparents—or the classical writers in the generations of Karl Marx and Max Weber—knew all too well, but more recent internalist theorists of nationalism tended to forget. The new theories are state-centered, perhaps their strongest aspect, compared to the romantic or demonic evaluations of nationalism by past commentators. Mylonas makes an even stronger claim by reminding us that modern states exist among other states in the powerful web of geopolitical, economic, and ideological relations. The external considerations of interstate rivalries, often a very brutal matter, is what heavily dominates internal political decisions regarding non-core groups, from benevolent assimilationism in the expectation of increasing the population and prestige of the nation, all the way to exclusion, expulsion, and, in extreme instances, genocidal extermination of groups that came to be regarded as fifth-columnists in the service of hostile foreign powers. The historical evidence gathered by Mylonas shows how easily the two extremes can change places in moments of perceived danger.

To the author's credit, he aptly meshes his levels of analysis. For, what exactly is a state, or, rather, where is it located? Is it always in the ministerial offices of the capital? What actually happens in weaker states, whether struggling to emerge or resisting imminent collapse, is that much power passes into the hands of provincial governors, extraordinary commissars, or downright warlords and paramilitary commanders, whose allegiance to the state seems dubious. Yet, as Mylonas shows, with a wealth of empirical examples, during trying and confusing times, especially during and immediately after wars, state action

can be generated at different levels of subordination or alleged insubordination. Mylonas's state-centered approach operates across the whole range of actors and arenas, from the imperialist designs of the Great Powers down to the mundane concerns of local governments and the improvisations of guerrilla bands.

Here, Mylonas's work connects to another front of advances in social research, namely, the study of the logics of violence in modern warfare. Civil wars are notoriously brutal, especially civil wars with an ethnic component. In what is already the elder generation of scholars, Stathis Kalyvas achieved a significant clarification regarding this extremely nasty subject matter. He showed with data that civil wars in fact tend to be more brutal than conventional interstate warfare. At a more theoretical plane, Kalyvas explained the objective parameters of apparent madness in the moments and places of contested control as well as the existence of important variation in degrees. As it turns out, not all violence amidst civil wars is equally brutal. There also emerge the "bubbles" of relative peace or rather mutual protection by the belligerents. Aphoristically, Kalyvas concluded that the best rational thing one can do at the beginning of conflict is to save the life of an enemy and his family. Alas, human emotions too often override reasoned calculation in the horrific situations of escalating suspicions, fratricide, and revenge.

Kalyvas's theory operates at the micro level. Now, his student Harris Mylonas takes the theory of ethnic war and peace to the macro-level of interstate politics, and Mylonas acknowledges that he continues in the footsteps of his teacher. This first book by Harris Mylonas points to promising scholarship in the future.

Georgi Derluguian
New York University Abu Dhabi