Post-Ottoman studies: An area studies that never was

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The Ottoman Empire lasted some six centuries (1299–1922) and disappeared a mere century ago. For much of this period, it was the suzerain force in the Eastern Mediterranean, Balkans, Anatolia, western Caucasus, North Africa, and Crimea.[1] Through centuries of Ottoman rule its populations, societies, and landscapes were marked by common politics, institutions, concepts, cultural traits, circulation of goods and people, and social institutions. While it by no means brought homogeneity, such common historical experience socialised Ottoman populations and shaped societies in similar ways across a broad field of human activities. Nevertheless, no systematic programme for the exploration of Ottoman legacies has to date emerged.[2] As a consequence, the geographical distribution, variation, and historical longevity of these legacies have yet to be fully explored and analysed. Moreover, in much scholarship, these legacies are outright ignored, assuming instead that the constituent parts were unmarked by centuries under Ottoman rule.

It should go without saying that any polity that secedes from another is at its inception marked by that relationship and by institutionalised practices for handling such a relationship. Rather than the claim that post-Ottoman states are marked by Ottoman legacies having to be argued, the onus of proof should in the first place have been on those claiming that *they are not*. In the case of the Levant, such legacies are casually assumed to linger after 9–25 years of European mandate rule, but generally overlooked for four centuries of Ottoman rule.[3] This is a typical case of Eurocentrism, whereby the primacy of European agency is the baseline assumption,

1 The degree of control and duration of rule did of course vary. For an overview of how the Ottoman Empire was ruled, see Barkey (2008).

2 While authors have used 'post-Ottoman' as a term or studied Ottoman imperial legacies (I enumerate them later), there are to my knowledge no institutions, meeting places, conferences, or journals devoted to this academic field. To the extent that scholars study Ottoman legacies, their findings will have to be slotted into arenas and contexts primarily concerned with something else. One exception is the rather young and vibrant community surrounding the *Ottoman History Podcast* (established by Chris Gratien and Emrah Safa Gürkan), which seems to be generally curated along the lines that it is concerned with all aspects of Ottoman and post-Ottoman space. See its list of episodes here: http://www.ottomanhistorypodcast.com/p/episode-list.html (accessed 16.07.2018).

3 See, e.g. Van Dam (1996).

while the importance of non-European agency is occluded (or at best has to be argued).

In this chapter I explore successor states of the Ottoman Empire as an area studies principle that never was; namely *post-Ottoman studies*.[4] The point is to propose this as a way to ask new questions, not immediately to provide answers. The claim in this chapter is that it is worthwhile making more comparisons between post-Ottoman polities, communities, and cultures across all fields of scholarship, and to study historical entanglements between them. The hypothesis, which is developed but largely left unanswered, is that there are important unexplored commonalities, in political, social and cultural terms, through much of post-Ottoman space. At the very least, it is worth considering avenues for studying these commonalities, as this may bring a better understanding of each individual polity and society (and phenomena within them), as well as insights into how imperial legacies linger in post-imperial space.

Historiographies of post-Ottoman polities

While Ottoman history is deemed integral to the study of Turkish history, which claims it as an immediate predecessor, the ways that the Ottoman Empire is fitted into the historiographies of Balkans and Middle Eastern states take two general forms. The first is that of nationalist history-writing, which presumes the pristineness of a nation oppressed by the Turks, submerged whole under a superficial layer of Ottoman suzerainty to be set free and rejuvenate in independence. As James Gelvin puts it "Since most of the historians who pioneered the study of the Arab provinces did not consult sources generated in Istanbul, they naturally took to a model in which the Ottoman state functioned as an imperial overlay on a society that was fundamentally self-organizing" (Gelvin 2006: 21). To this, I would add that there was perhaps an ideological aspect to such representations, as most post-Ottoman states explicitly distanced themselves from the Ottoman Empire for political reasons. There is a similar tendency in post-Ottoman Balkans polities, where 'the nation' is represented as dominated by 'the Turks' but unsullied by interaction with them.[5] The baseline assumption is that these peoples or communities were not really Ottoman, or that their Ottomanness was superficial – something that could easily be shed, leaving an essentially pure *national* community underneath.[6] In this narrative, it is anathema to mention the fact that many of the individuals celebrated retrospectively as nationalist heroes were also participating in Ottoman public life, writing in

4 By area studies principle, I mean the principle by which a given human group – and its culture, history, language and politics – are included in or excluded from a particular *area studies* as an academic field.

5 For discussions, see Greene (2015); Silverman (1983).

6 For an example of this, see Hourani (1968).

Ottoman, pursuing Ottoman careers and cooperating with the Ottoman central authorities. Until the second half of the nineteenth century, there were few avenues to elite status in the Ottoman Empire that did not involve close interaction with imperial institutions (Yaycioglu 2016). Even though nationalist historiographies tend to occlude this fact, new national elites are not immaculately conceived, but are elites by virtue of their position within an empire. This part of the literature no longer dominates historical research, but it tends nevertheless to be present in canonical works (and hence read by non-specialists) and serves as the baseline against which new, revisionist scholarship is directed.

The second approach to dealing with the Ottoman past is a revisionist trend of the past two decades that acknowledges the importance of the Ottoman context and Ottoman influence up until the First World War, but then sequesters its legacies to particular (mostly non-political) realms. In the words of Maria Todorova:

> […] the conclusion that the Balkans are [in itself an] Ottoman legacy is not an overstatement. While, in the narrow sense of the word, the presence of the Ottoman Empire in the southeast European peninsula had a lifetime spanning from the fourteenth to the early twentieth centuries, the Ottoman legacy bears first and foremost the characteristics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In practically all spheres in which the Ottoman legacy can be traced (political, cultural, social, and economic), a drastic break occurred at the time of secession and was largely completed by the end of World War I. In the demographic sphere and the sphere of popular culture, the Ottoman legacy has had a more persistent and continuous life. It also has had a prolonged existence as the legacy of perception, constantly invented and reinvented, as long as historical self identity will be deemed crucial in Balkan societies (Todorova 2009: 12–13).

Similar things have been written for the Arab Middle East (Masters 2013). As part of a revisionist trend, this scholarship makes the argument that the Ottoman Empire *was* in fact important as a context and point of interaction for non-Turkish and non-Muslim communities, and that the communities were in fact Ottoman, but that the legacy since the First World War is only present in a few aspects of social life. The leading work in international historical sociology of the Middle East limits this even further, implying that it was the 'coming of modernity' that relegated Ottoman legacies to "traces of earlier, Ottoman linguistic and gastronomic influences" (Halliday 2005: 49). Contrary to this I would claim that the thoroughness of the historical rupture between Ottoman and post-Ottoman is an empirical question that has largely been left under-studied, but has in many cases merely assumed.[7] A related matter is that, if constituent parts were similarly shaped or socialised within the Ottoman

7 Some of the empirical work that has been done yields a promising perspective on post-Ottoman space, and generally finds that these legacies are not solely in non-political realms: Anscombe (2014); Bryant (2004 and 2016); Meeker (2002); Provence (2005 and 2017).

suzerain realms, and the homogenising forces of modernity (and independence) that created the rupture were much the same across the board, would not the hybridisation of these two sets of practices have resulted in certain similarities across post-Ottoman space? In other words, there may be similarities across post-Ottoman space (i.e. between post-Ottoman polities) that do not immediately appear as similarities within the same community across the Ottoman/post-Ottoman threshold but are indirect results of Ottoman legacies nevertheless.

State of the non-field

At the level above the historiographies of individual nation-states, the study of post-Ottoman space is divided between different scholarly fields (the most important current instantiation is area studies). These fields are important in that they often provide the institutional context for research, and consequently shape research agendas. How we as scholars conceptualise our scholarly fields shapes how we educate students, what research gets funded, and what collaborations spring from the organisation of academic departments. In addition to their importance for the organisation of university departments, scholarly fields[8] and disciplines[9] are often held together institutionally, and are able to confer legitimacy, by the existence of attendant associations, with their journals, conferences, and awards.[10] No such institutional setup exists for the study of post-Ottoman space.

Academic divisions of labour necessarily have an element of arbitrariness that is tied to institutional histories and political factors (Abbott 2001). The ways they are shaped can exclude certain questions and explanations, while priming researchers and students to look for explanations in specific ways. Whether one uses a linguistic principle of organisation, such as Turkology, religion, such as *Islamwissenschaft*,[11]

8 Typically defined by the similarities of their empirical, linguistic, cultural, or geographical similarities, and including area studies, which brings together scholars who also have different *disciplinary* affiliations.

9 Where the research agenda is more narrowly defined by method or theoretical concerns, typified by endeavours such as anthropology (defined by its method) or political science (concerned with studying politics and the state).

10 The Middle Eastern Studies Association is an arena to present work on Ottoman history, thus integrating its study institutionally with Middle Eastern studies. Conferences in Europe (except BRISMES), on the other hand, are typically arenas that straddle Turkish and Ottoman studies, while also allowing for Turkology. See *Gesellschaft für Turkologie, Osmanistik und Türkeiforschung e.V.* (GTOT) or *Comité international des études pré-ottomanes et ottomanes* (CIEPO).

11 Which may be translated as *Islamic studies*, but the German and the Anglo-American traditions are different in that the former has a broad philological approach to studying Islamic states and societies by way of learning Arabic, Persian, Ottoman and ideally also Urdu, the latter focuses more on religious affairs.

or geographic region, such as the Middle East, Balkans and Caucasus, some societies, states, and groups of people are compartmentalised and studied together, while excluding others that may have important similarities that are consequently left unexplored.

Scholars are shaped by the combination of skills that we acquire through our education and training, and in the study of post-Ottoman societies, the most important scholarly skill is typically a language; Arabic, Turkish, Greek, Armenian, Georgian, Serbo-Croatian, Bulgarian and Albanian being the main ones. Languages are resource-demanding to acquire; time, effort, and talent are all needed both on the part of the student and of their teachers. While skills vary from individual to individual and expectations vary from one scholarly tradition to another, there is a limit to how many languages a scholar can reasonably be expected to learn. Learning languages that display a great degree of similarity to one the scholar already knows decreases the resources needed to learn them.[12]

I have so far come across three works that that systematically try to engage with Ottoman legacies across post-Ottoman space. First of all, there is Carl Brown's edited volume *Imperial Legacy: The Ottoman Imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East*, which includes contributions by many of the leading scholars of Brown's generation (Brown 1996). The organising principle of this edited volume is that it seeks out legacies across different topics, such as language, economics, military and religion on the one hand, and across geographies on the other. Since then, the topic seems to have gained relatively little traction before Frederick Anscombe's monograph that uses the Ottoman Empire as an entry-point into discussing the political history of the entire Balkans and Middle East up until the present (Anscombe 2014). Finally, there is Rebecca Bryant's edited volume that takes a post-Ottoman perspective on the phenomenon of 'co-existence' and compiles studies from across post-Ottoman space (Bryant 2004). Given the insights presented in these works, as well as the fruitful results of studies of Ottoman legacies in single sites or contexts, I believe they offer quite a fruitful avenue for further exploration.[13]

Geopolitics and area studies

Some of the key area studies present in Western universities are closely connected with imperial projects, or stem from imperialist or geo-political concerns of great powers. Post-Soviet studies emerges from Western study of Soviet and Russian imperial projects. African studies are divided into Francophone, Anglophone, and Lusophone Africa, grouping together states colonised by the French (and Belgians),

12 This is one obvious explanation why Ottoman history is often studied by scholars trained in Turkish studies, as knowledge of the Turkish language helps in learning Ottoman.

13 Solid examples include Bryant (2004).

the British, or the Portuguese.[14] When it comes to post-Ottoman space the classificatory principles are also related to imperial concerns. While the 'Middle East' does not have an origin as an imperial administrative unit, it nevertheless seems to have emerged primarily as a concept and category by virtue of its being an arena for outside competition, and the geopolitical concerns of British and American foreign and imperial policies (Davidson 1960; Foilard 2017). This is what may be deemed an 'outside-in' area, in the sense that the grouping-together of peoples, societies, cultures, and political practices that happens by the use of this concept primarily happens through exogenous concerns.[15] There are clearly cultural and linguistic commonalities *within* the Middle East, but concept formation was not primarily driven by these commonalities, but by outside imperial ambitions directed at 'the Middle East'. One competing endogenous principle – a principle for organising a region inside-out – has been the Arabic language, and the attendant political ideology of pan-Arab nationalism, whose irredentism tends to cover everything from Western Sahara to Oman, and Sudan to the Turkish border.

Coincidentally or not, 'the Middle East' took over as an academic organising principle across much of Europe (having already done so in the United States) following Edward Said's criticism of the scholarly field of Oriental studies – the study of non-European societies with long-standing written literary traditions.[16] His claim was that the field served to reify 'the East' as an object onto which Westerners projected their preconceived ideas, and that these together served as the handmaiden of imperialism (Said 1978). While Said may have thrown out a few babies with his bath water, there can be little doubt as to the validity of his key insight; that 'the Orient' is a Western conception. However, there are few scholarly fields within Western universities that are *not* primarily conceived by Western scholars.[17] This should come as little surprise; people conceive the world through categories of their own (collective) making, and scholarly pursuits are no exception to this. The main question then becomes whether the scholarly categories in question (a) correspond to categories that the people under study use to self-identify, and (b) serve to highlight commonalities by grouping similar states, societies, cultures, and languages together.

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14 There are also area studies that do not directly spring from imperial concerns or legacies, such as Latin American studies, European studies, and Scandinavian studies, although the latter is co-extensive with a Swedish conceptualisation of its imperial 'nation', see Neumann (1994).

15 For the distinction between 'outside-in' and 'inside-out' regions, see Neumann (1994).

16 Focusing his study uniquely on English and French texts, it is clear that Said largely overlooked scholarly pursuits that had little or nothing to do with imperial ambitions (Marchand 2009).

17 In the case of 'Islam' and 'the Muslim world' Cemil Aydın and Dietrich Jung would both contend that these are dialogical relationships, involving both Muslims and Western intellectuals (Aydin 2017; Jung 2011).

The answer to (a) is that neither Oriental studies nor Middle Eastern studies can be said to be based on a wide-spread identity category used by the people it is used to refer to. Few people in their right minds would say 'I am an Oriental' or 'I am a Middle Easterner'. If they do, it is primarily as a response to social stigmatisation by use of these categories and interpellation into them.[18] Moreover, it is a recent phenomenon that comes *in response to* scholarly and outside political classifications. While the Ottoman Empire is similar in this respect – few individuals would today primarily identify as an Ottoman or post-Ottoman – it *has been* a category used to identify oneself.[19] Whether this is in itself a weighty argument for using it as a scholarly principle is a different matter. In many ways, Turkology is also logically and temporally prior to Turkish and Turkic nationalisms.[20] It was used by nationalists to create their own ideologies and conceptions of language-based nationalism, including pan-Turkism and pan-Turanism. One major difference from 'Oriental' and 'Middle Easterner' is the degree to which these Turkish and Turkic nationalisms have become the primary concepts and categories with which individuals identify, something that we do not see with the categories of 'Oriental' and 'Middle Easterner'.

The answer to (b) – whether the scholarly categories in question serve to highlight commonalities by grouping similar states, societies, cultures, and languages together – is about analytic utility. This is therefore specific to whether the question one seeks to answer is of a political, cultural, or linguistic kind. These three types of question are not unrelated, and as phenomena they emerge through historical interaction. For much of the past six centuries, a very important context for such interaction, of all three types, was the Ottoman Empire. Hence, although it is clearly not *the only* relevant perspective, it would make sense to see these languages, cultures, societies and states in light of their mutual entanglements.

A shift in primacy from one set of questions – say, from linguistic to political questions as they are conceived by Western foreign policy makers – also comes with a shift in emphasis from one scholarly classification principle to another. The hegemonic shift within academia, from departments devoted to philological pursuits such as Turkology and Arabic studies to Middle Eastern studies, is concomitant with this shift in the primacy of which questions get asked, funded and answered. Moreover, it is intimately tied to how explanations are sought.

While also emerging within a context of Oriental studies and not divorced from Russian and other imperial designs, the field of Turkology springs more from linguistic similarities in the groups and sources studied than from other concerns. There may be some overtones here of nations conceived primarily in linguistic terms which somehow *belong* together and therefore should be studied alongside one

18 For this process, see Althusser (1972); Goffman (1963); Wigen (2018).

19 See e.g. Campos (2010).

20 Though it is clear that interest in Turkology and the resources states devoted to it were also tied in with European imperial concerns, see Landau (1995).

another,[21] but there is clearly the issue that these linguistic similarities can primarily be understood and studied as a continuum of change (Johanson & Csató eds. 1998; Golden 1992). While both Turkology and the German tradition of *Islamwissenschaft* both have important insights to offer when studying Ottoman history, neither of them study the Ottoman Empire in its entirety or make systematic comparisons across post-Ottoman space. By privileging study of sources written (or otherwise collected orally) in either Turkic languages or the set of 'Islamic languages', comparison across the Middle East/Balkans divide are played down. It is true that Turkology has produced studies of linguistic hybridity that do transcend dichotomies such as Christian/Muslim and Balkans/Middle East, and Bernt Brendemoen's studies of Greek-Turkish language contact are eminent examples of this (Brendemoen 1999 and 2001). These provide a good basis for understanding how contemporary phenomena, in this case linguistic, emerged in an Ottoman context.

Organicism

While the Ottoman Empire is seldom referred to as the origin of specific institutions in post-Ottoman space, much is explained by reference to Islamic tradition, especially in the Middle East. This treats Islam as distinct from Ottomanness, as a cache of legitimacy that the Ottomans merely *drew upon*, but which the Ottomans had little power in shaping.[22] The Ottoman Empire largely legitimised its rule by use of Islamic tropes, practices, and institutions, and bound Muslims to itself by virtue of its common religiosity. Mosques and Sufi brotherhoods were used as networks to mobilise Muslims for a common cause, and in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the boundary between Christians and Muslims within the Ottoman Empire became politicised in ways that it had not previously been (Tezcan 2010). In a sense, it would be difficult to conceive of Islam in the Ottoman Empire *without the Sultan* or *Caliph*. Given that the Ottoman dynasty was so intertwined with religion, it should come as little surprise that much of what is today considered Islamic tradition among Muslim post-Ottoman societies consists in fact of formations that took place under Ottoman rule (Burak 2015). For ideological reasons – religious innovation, *bida'a*, also meaning deviance from the narrow path – the Ottomans could only legitimise such changes by claims of 'ancientness' or 'timelessness', and that it was inherent in proper Islam. This was a convenient way to deny the fact that a lot of Islamic law was formed under Ottoman rule (Ahmed 2015).

21 The competing principle that is often asserted is one whereby the Turkic-speaking polities in Central Asia, Caucasus and within the Russian Federation are studied in a Russian imperial, Soviet and post-Soviet context, grouped together for political purposes rather than as linguistically-defined nations.

22 For an example, see Sugar (1977: 6).

Like Islam being some supposedly timeless entity existing independently of its use by the Ottoman dynasty and hybridisation with Ottoman practices,[23] so also did post-Ottoman historiographies conceive their newly-won nation-states as organic wholes submerged in and oppressed by an Ottoman empire. A canonical work in this respect is Albert Hourani's 1968 article 'Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables', where the organic ties between urban elites and their clients are given pride of place in constituting 'Arab society', largely untouched by the Ottomans. In Hourani's conceptualisation, these remained as organic wholes through four centuries of Ottoman rule, only to be ruptured by the boundaries of the mandate system (the 'Sykes-Picot borders'), the establishment of Israel and the *Nakba*. There is no reason to claim that the Ottoman centre penetrated deeply into society outside the capital, at least not until the introduction of mass education by Sultan Abdülhamid II (1876–1908). Local power brokers, religious leaders, strongmen, and notables did to some extent monopolise the exercise of power over imperial subjects, both in the areas where people spoke Arabic and other places. However, one should not ignore the fact that while commoners had little contact with the Ottoman centre, these middlemen were elites by virtue of their contact with the centre (Yaycioglu 2016). The Ottoman Empire had very few elites who were not also middlemen socialised into an Ottoman common language and culture. As put by the American historian James Gelvin:

> the first "Arab nationalists" were, for the most part, members in some sense of the Ottoman ruling elite; or, to be more precise, members of those great families in the cities of the Arab provinces who had a tradition of learning and social leadership, had always played a part in the Ottoman system of local government, and from the late nineteenth century were being drawn more fully into the Ottoman service as officers or civil servants (Gelvin 2006: 27).

Hence, if states are run by elites, and these elites did not come out of nowhere, it follows that continuities between Ottoman and post-Ottoman should perhaps be sought not among commoners, but between Ottoman middlemen and 'national' elites.

Levels of analysis

Given what seems to be a fairly systematic distancing of post-Ottoman states from the Ottoman Empire, studying Ottoman legacies requires types of analysis that do not necessarily take the statements of the people in question for granted. We are dealing with what Kenneth Pike called *etic* accounts – accounts made by outsiders

23 Steppe-nomadic tradition also plays a key role here: Neumann & Wigen (2018: 155–156).

(Pike 1954). On the *emic* level – how cultural insiders in the various post-Ottoman states and societies make sense of their world – the Ottoman Empire seems to have been deliberately written out of the story of the self. The self-professed nations that Ottoman peripheral elites referred to when claiming independent nation-states were narrated as wholes submerged in and oppressed by the Ottomans, being timeless vessels that by pre-dating the Ottoman Empire also had existence separate from it.[24] I will outline five levels of analysis that might be useful to distinguish when approaching Ottoman legacies in post-Ottoman space.

The first is the hermeneutic level; how all of these polities have dealt explicitly with the Ottoman past, what it means in national ideologies and the like. This is a level typically privileged by historians.[25] I would suggest that there may be a number of interesting parallels here, whereby all, including the Turkish Republic, initially distinguished themselves strongly from the Ottoman past, but where the importance and meaning of things Ottoman have waxed and waned over time. Most notably, there is an important story to be told about how different post-Ottoman states deal with the emergence of neo-Ottomanism in Turkish cultural representations (e.g. the TV series *Muhteşem Yüzyıl*, and the use of Ottoman architectural styles), Islamist nationalism (celebrating the conquest of Istanbul by dressing up as Janissaries), and in Turkish foreign policy (using the Ottoman past to legitimise interaction with other post-Ottoman states).

The second level is the level of *formal* organisation; continuities in social and political units such as provinces, nation-states, cities and the like. This is the level privileged by political scientists and historians who work in a tradition of nation-state ontology. This is also the level where there has been the most change from Ottoman to post-Ottoman, and along with the distancing that has happened at the hermeneutic level, it is primarily these changes that historians and political scientists emphasise when they take for granted that the Ottoman Empire has little or nothing to say for the study of post-Ottoman politics.

The third level is that of continuity at the level of personnel and of human stock. It is has to be stressed that although by and large a biological and material continuity, this is not a continuity of *essence*. While there are clear continuities between the Ottoman Empire and post-Ottoman states at the level of personnel (Provence 2017), individuals change throughout their lives and there may be clear changes from one generation to the next, especially through changes in formal organisation. The extent and ways in which change takes place, as well as what stays the same, are empirical questions. The 'ethnic composition' of the various territories of the Ottoman Empire changed significantly in the decade immediately before and the one after the collapse of the Empire, and who ended up where had important social and political consequences for the successor states (Dündar 2008; Kasaba 2009).

24 For a particularly incisive take on this, see Greene (2015: 9–12, 43–54).

25 For contributions within International Relations that deals with memories of Ottoman suzerainty on a hermeneutic level, see Ejdus (2017).

The fourth level is the level of language in use; how ways of conducting politics *in language* display continuities between Ottoman and post-Ottoman conditions. The question of whether one should see Turkish as a continuation of Ottoman, or whether the 'purified' Turkish should be considered a separate language, is at least a question open to debate (Holbrook 1994; Lewis 1999). There can be little doubt that a transformation of meaning took place, but there is no doubt that there are many continuities in the way that actors give meaning to their world and to their politics (Wigen 2018). The extent to which other languages used under Ottoman rule were marked by transformations of meaning happening through entanglement with Ottoman language is by and large a set of unanswered questions. There has been very little written about how languages other than the Ottoman language itself were used to give meaning to Ottoman politics and interactions with the Ottoman suzerain power.[26] As a consequence, we know little about whether Ottoman political concepts and entanglements with these were used to set up post-Ottoman states.[27]

The fifth level of analysis is that of *practice*, the implicit rules by which people interact. These are related both to the formal organisations in which they may be specific to, but also to the language individuals use to give them meaning. However, people may continue a practice while re-interpreting its meaning. Hence, stuff that is no longer 'thought of' as Ottoman (or indeed never was) may have unrecognised Ottoman origins. As argued by Guy Burak and mentioned above, this seems to be the case for Islamic law, which bears a strong imprint of its formation under Ottoman rule (Burak 2015). As Wittgenstein puts it, "Our talk gets its meaning from the rest of our proceedings" (Wittgenstein 1975: §229). It is therefore worthwhile also to look at 'the rest of our proceedings', or rather the rest of the proceedings of post-Ottoman societies, to try to study how these may or may not be related to Ottoman practices and institutions, and indeed shared across post-Ottoman space. Practices are 'competent performances' dependent on implicit knowledge, and the way individuals are socialised prime them for interaction with similarly-socialised others (Adler & Pouliot 2011: 6). If there is a substrate of Ottoman institutions and political practices that has shaped contemporary post-Ottoman states, they should be primed for interaction in similar ways, and thus be primed to interact competently with one another. It does, however, take a lot of effort and direct observation to study these matters, and it might be for this reason that anthropologists are among the first to become attentive to post-Ottoman space (see e.g. Bryant 2004).

26 But see Abu-'Uksa (2016).

27 For a rare comparison between post-Ottoman languages that are usually divided into separate area studies, see Brisku (2013).

Conclusion

The division of labour between various scholars researching post-Ottoman polities occludes questions that should have been asked. However, some, like Carl Brown, Rebecca Bryant, and Frederick Anscombe, have tried addressing some of these questions. In combination with the growing body of literature that traces Ottoman legacies in individual cases drawn from the entirety of post-Ottoman space, I believe post-Ottoman space might have been (or perhaps might become) a productive area studies principle that could generate a fertile field of study. While I am myself most interested in political, social and linguistic legacies and commonalities, there is no reason not to also to study legal, culinary, or cultural legacies or commonalities, or any other facet of human interaction that usually makes up the field of inquiry in area studies. Why is it that Turkish soap operas succeed in capturing audiences in post-Ottoman space? To what extent are the similarities in 'national' post-Ottoman cuisines due to the circulation of common Ottoman culinary practices?[28] Are there commonalities between the ways in which post-Ottomans conceptualise and conduct politics? There seem to be in the ways that Albanians and Georgians conceptualise *Europe* (Brisku 2013), so perhaps this is a common trait across post-Ottoman space? It is not that all such questions need answering, but post-Ottoman studies might be a good framework to start asking more of them.

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