

Some concluding remarks

Dear colleagues, dear participants to our conference: Smyrna as a Symbol: From the 19th century to September 1922.

I just intend to make a few concluding remarks. I will not try to mention everyone, but I hope you may recognize some of your input in the following thoughts.

I first thank all of you for your active participation. All sessions were rich and well-attended. We were helped in our organization by selfless students of our Department of Turkish Studies. And the Organizing Committee is very happy the practical aspects of our academic event.

As far as content is concerned, I think our conference was the best organized by our department and certainly a distinct one among all the academic meetings which took place in Greece and elsewhere about Smyrna and this city's destruction.

Why is it so?

Certainly because of the international nature and open quality of our programme. We heard communications from various countries, in different languages and from various points of view. I believe that we managed to reduce the common *pathos* about the history of a forever gone-by time. However, it would be shallow to omit the violent and structurally deleterious aspects of the regimes that pretended to rule over Smyrna and non-Muslims inhabitants of Western Asia Minor. In the same lines, there were many mentions about the *muḥācir* that is all Muslims, even Greek-speaking ones, constrained to move away from the places they considered their homes from the late 18th century until 1924.

We all felt that cosmopolitanism with its glittering aura in retrospect, and possibly the nostalgia it inspired to non-Muslim refugees or even today's inhabitants of İzmir is a problematic term. The plurality of inhabitants, languages, religions, habits in the Aegean city was certainly not a peaceful or static social arrangement, similar to a charming postcard. The situation of Ottoman Smyrna at the meeting point of the old Islamic anthropological order of submission, Hamit Bozarslan used the word humiliation, of non-Muslims to the true believers of the one and only

true and complete form of monotheistic faith did collide with the new dynamics of semi-colonial capitalist expansionist course of Western Europe. France, Britain, Italian lands and then Italy, German lands and then Germany and Austria-Hungary, and finally the US imposed their imprint on this harbour, certainly much more than in other places in the inner territories of the Ottoman empire. In the collision of the two systems of domination and regulation, the existence of Smyrna did receive its quite unique character: one could escape the Ottoman symbolical and political order in seeking the protection of Western Powers, that had managed to benefit from the “Capitulations”. Local Christians and Jews, even if only nominal Christians for Western Christians convinced of their doctrinal and ritual superiority, even if degenerated Jews for the agents of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, managed to combine the heritage of protected separateness, while escaping the humiliation thanks to this ephemeral situation. If we look at remote places like Diyarbakır, social dynamics were not so favourable for non-Muslims, although these may have been a majority, absolute or relative, within the city. Classical Islam or traditional Ottoman social order do not take care of numbers: a *raʿāyā* is a *raʿāyā*, a *zimmī* is a *zimmī* whatever the proportion of religious groups at a given place.

The major presence of the West, in its diversity and in its ambiguity, in Smyrna opened up the stalemate for non-Muslims and I know that some Muslim inhabitants did benefit too from this ephemeral situation: all had in Smyrna or İzmir a better chance of getting formal education, learning a foreign language, conducting business, learning skills, accessing to better hygiene and medical care than in remote areas in the interior provinces. That not all of them benefited from the possibilities is all too evident. But these are anachronical demands in the 19th century.

Gâvur İzmir certainly reversed the normal order of things. Smyrna went beyond the *tanzīmāt* and endangered the symbolical and practical domination of the Ottoman élite, proud of their Turkish and Islamic heritage. It was certainly the double focus of admiration, envy and irritation if not outright hatred to this social group, dominant on the paper, dominant through state-related occupations, but often disinterested in lucrative business, trade and industry. I understand their frustration, after all as members of academia, we probably aren’t very different from them. In these neoliberal times, we are obliged to look for resources once indifferent outside of the state budget. And this is a new time-and pride-consuming activity, which we are not all able to devote ourselves to. – I here want to thank my colleague Efi Kanner for having devoted her time to looking for and finding sponsors, whose funding made this academic event possible. This was necessary even though the University of Athens did support us financially and technically.

The special geographical place made the perspective of final dis-Ottomanization of Smyrna a realistic perspective. As of 1913, Greece became a direct neighbour. Chios was under Hellenic rule and the Greek speaking, Orthodox coast of Asia Minor could have followed suit. Greeks or Rômioi / *Rūmlar* were not discreet about their political and national or nationalist passions. Smyrna was a place where new and bold symbolical affiliations could be proclaimed. Hoisting a Hellenic flag on one's house, shop, school was a minor but visual step towards a new affiliation. Demonstrating full support to the Hellenic Army by collecting funds and sending the money to Hellenic forces at war with the Empire elsewhere, for instance in Thessaly, in 1897 - or even by embarking in order to join the Hellenic Army were quite telling about the ideological shifts, that had already taken place in the minds of the most numerous *zimmī* in Smyrna.

The CUP aimed at stopping the drifting apart of Gâvur İzmir. As a positivist, organicist, and social-Darwinist organization, it would not hesitate to implement any means to this end. Demanding intertitles in silent films to be written in the Ottoman language and Perso-Arabian alphabet was only a sign of reaction. It was meaningful, because only a minority of Smyrna residents knew this writing system, even among the Muslim population. It did alarm French diplomats posted at Smyrna. They analysed this demand as a bad omen for the precarious balance of their city. Rightly so.

The violence experienced elsewhere in the Empire from the aftermath of the Second Balkan War until 1918 was unknown in Smyrna. The vicinity however was not spared by ethnic rearrangement. I am certainly sympathetic to the anguish, in which local Armenians had to live during WW1, knowing that the bulk of their people was assassinated or sent to a certain death on deportation roads to the Syrian deserts. The relative miracle of Smyrna emerging almost untouched from WW1 made the port city all the more desirable for appetites unleashed after the Ottoman defeats.

From the first days after the Moudros armistice, local Greeks did not conceal that they deemed the Ottoman sovereignty an illegitimate situation. Armenians, both locals but also the survivors converging to this city, could not support the continuation of this status quo. Who can contest the legitimacy of their point of view?

The landing of Greek troops is certainly an epochal landmark for all groups involved. We heard during this conference that the Entente was no homogeneous, no harmonious group of victors. The bold policy of expansion applied by Venizelos and probably supported by Britain and

accepted by France at first was a perilous undertaking. It would have required continuity, consistency and persistence from the Hellenic state, the Greek populations both in the Hellenic motherland and in the Ottoman provinces occupied and administered by Greece. There were no such things.

Whatever the qualities of Aristídis Stergiádis, whatever the grandiose plans for the equipment of Hellenic Smyrna in the service of all residents – the University of Ionia is the most magnificent and tragical example of Greek ambitions to embody modernity – the lack of political commitment at home and of diplomatic consistency internationally doomed the Smyrna adventure to failure.

Ottoman or post-Ottoman agency cannot be underrated. Mustafa Kemal was not a self-made man. He was an Ottoman military hero from the Dardanelles battle onward, a *g̃āzī* in the most classical terminology of Islamic political and military order. His mission bestowed on him by the Sultan is a striking example of subversion: instead of dismantling the Ottoman army and inspecting the disarmament of the vanquished Ottoman state, he preserved and reinforced military organization, gaining autonomy from the centre with the backing of the military, the local Muslim population and certainly those who did benefit from the genocidal process against non-Muslims in the provinces. Who had any interest in settling old accounts otherwise than preventing by any means the return of Armenian or Greek survivors to their former homes, pretending to recuperate their former assets? Raymond Kévorkian's keynote speech on our first meeting day was precise – even graphic – as far as the treatment of survivors was concerned.

It is only obvious that these political dynamics, which was new as far as the marginalization of Sultanic authority was concerned, but in fact much in the continuation of the CUP ideological plans and of the Ottoman army's traditions, magnificently countered the expansionist hybris of the small Hellenic state. I am fascinated by the support the Bolsheviks brought to what they deemed a proletarian movement of liberation, while an Ottoman officer simply did not accept the loss of *dârü'l-İslām* to former *zimmī*.

The arson of Smyrna, turning the city to a burnt-down and thus purified place to be rebuilt is the episode that crystallizes memory in Greece and among interested Armenians. It is quite unbelievable that some may persist in demanding an ultimate written proof of the responsibility of the Kemalist armed forces, both regular and irregular, in the destruction of the city. These I want to believe naïve demands ignore the practice of secrecy of the CUP and its heir Kemalist movement. Marrying a Turkish lady or teaching Turkish history does not necessitate to espouse

state denialism, which is only the prolongation of blatant violence perpetrated from 1913 onwards. I want to put this attitude in contrast with the accessibility of French – but not only – documents on violence committed by the occupying and retreating Hellenic army in the interior lands. There is no taboo, no limits sent to research about these topics in French or British archives. If Greek pupils do not learn sufficiently about it, I know that some groups in the Greek society are not so naïve as to believe the occupation went smoothly. Until now, I have never been prevented to teach the truth about these unflattering phenomena and I am devoted to teaching further this aspect of history.

Demanding the ultimate proof and recusing the imperfect one, because absolute doubt is always presented as legitimate is a pervert attitude. I think of Marc Nichanian's book, which should be translated in Greek and Turkish: *La perversion historiographique, une réflexion arménienne*, published in 2015. Demanding proofs from the victims of a crime which implies denial is a comfortable and very conformist attitude. Do not think a second that the German élite, illuminated by guilt, remorse or Christian introspection, would have renounced the benefits of eliminating the Jews or expanding their state to an infinite Lebensraum if not vanquished.

As far as moder İzmir is concerned. I want to say that this is a place I find pleasant, similar to disfigured Piraeus, even less ugly than Piraeus, with a surprising resemblance with modern day Thessaloniki. I was intrigued by the ideas of overwriting history in commemoration, actually a prolongation of denialism to this day. I was charmed by the quality of fragmentary palimpsest of the urban fabrics a colleague of ours suggested yesterday, as if reality resisted distortion, despite all human and inhuman efforts of putting the past in a filtered and convenient perspective. This is a touch of optimism, we owe to Dilek Kaya, I am happy to conclude with.

Thank you for your presence, participation and attention even until the very end of this long conference.