

author is careful to portray both of these perspectives without being biased.

The new perspective on WWI portrayed in *A Land of Aching Hearts* is itself enough to

make the book worth reading. Especially as far as the academicians and students of international relations are concerned, this book may be beneficial in terms of providing insight into the Middle East of WWI.

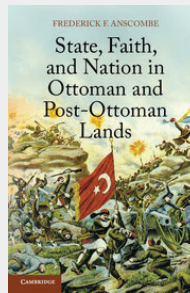
State, Faith, and Nation in Ottoman and Post-Ottoman Lands

By Frederick Anscombe

USA: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 339 pages, \$34.99, ISBN: 9781107615236.

Reviewed by Dunja Resanović

IN *STATE, FAITH, AND NATION IN OTTOMAN AND POST-OTTOMAN LANDS*, Frederick F. Anscombe frames his narrative around the themes of “state, faith, and nation,” concerning which the dominant scholarly narratives about the history of Ottoman and Post-Ottoman lands are wavering. The author aims at challenging the (pre)assumptions of the existing scholarship, and shedding new light on the aforementioned subject. His reevaluation emphasizes the transition from the Ottoman to post-Ottoman lands, drawing attention to the importance of understanding how religion and nation were developed and used by the post-Ottoman states as social and political concepts. It is clear that Anscombe is interested in religion as a social concept, particularly the way it has been reciprocally framed and used as an ideological and identity tool, as well as a legitimizer in the state-population interrelation. This emphasis on religion as an ideological tool gives rise to uncertainty regarding the reasons why the author chose the term “faith” for his title and definition of his main themes, given that faith seems to connote a more spiritual frame of mind on the part of religious believers.



The first part of the book, “The Ottoman Empire,” provides an extensive overview of the Empire’s political transitions, starting from the mid-eighteenth century until its dissolution, looking at it through the prism of complex interrelations of identity and the ideological nature of the state, relations between the state and its population, and external developments and international affairs. Using a vast literature of secondary sources dealing with the period, Anscombe reassesses what has been written in order to set the ground for his main argument and new narrative perspective. His reevaluation is extremely valuable for registering the importance of the relationship between the state and its population. Looking back at primary sources, Anscombe offers a better understanding of popular allegiances and state legitimacy. Thus, Anscombe develops two main arguments: first, that Islam had played the role of comprising the ideological backbone of the state, granting identity to the Empire and ensuring its legitimacy; and second that the population consequently identified within its religious identities on the supra-local level until the Empire’s dissolution.

The second part, “From Ottoman to Post-Ottoman States,” looks closely at the emergence of the post-Ottoman states. The newly emerged Christian states in the Balkans, lacking the ideological legitimacy to establish a foundational relationship between the state and the population, adopted the western model of nationalism as their form of legitimizing politics. Similar trajectories can be followed in Turkey, in the attempt to replace Muslim identity with Turkish identity so as to legitimate the new state. Anscombe derives these points of remarkable importance from his reassessment of secondary sources. However, due to the author’s ambition to encompass all the post-Ottoman states, the analysis remains in the domain of reshuffling the mainstream assumptions, embarking on the subject, and leaving space for further research. Moreover, the more complex mechanisms of transfer and shifts of identity politics deriving from various sources, with different mechanisms at different times in different places, have not yet been systematically studied. Although the author uses his academic authority to develop the argument, without the use of primary sources and a closer look into particular case studies, it cannot be firmly grounded, but rather tackled as a challenging issue.

The strongest aspect of the first part of the book lies in the continuous demonstration of the relationship between state and population, mainly drawn from the use of primary sources. However, this is a pitfall in the second part. Even though Anscombe points out that nation-building is ‘work in progress,’ he does not analyze it thoroughly as a process in his approach, but rather looks at it as a folded, single event, strictly imposed from the top-down. Furthermore, while he elaborates on the ways in which the newly emerging national identities needed to find their ways to the populations through strong local

and religious allegiances, he very modestly examines how the different states attempted to incorporate these ranges of local identities into a single national identity. Therefore, while the author’s main argument is based on the transitions from Ottoman to Post-Ottoman lands, the analysis remains rather on the level of an assessment of the existing sources.

On the other hand, Anscombe’s treatment of the developments of the post-Ottoman Arab lands are in line with the current, dominant academic postulates, which see the protracted struggling complexity of the emergence of state identities in the lingering European presence in the region, consequently leaving Arabism and Islam as continuous forces asserting state political influence. Even though Anscombe does not look at the society’s relation to the state ideologies in this chapter either, still, on a limited number of pages, he manages to demonstrate a host of geographical regional, sub-regional, religious, linguistic and national identities at work in building of nation states in the Middle East.

The analysis of the ‘contemporary’ Balkans and Turkey in the third part of the book aims at demonstrating the contemporary relevance of the transitional politics of the Ottoman to post-Ottoman lands. The Balkans are observed through the course of the 1990s, a period that witnessed the emergence, mobilization, and misuses of the religion-nation identity ties. Conversely, Turkey is analyzed from a different perspective, through a thorough elaboration of the radical politics involved in the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, coupled with the suppression of Islam, in an attempt to blend it into Turkish identity. Further on, the author elaborates on the reestablishment of Islam in public life after the abolition of repressive state policies, ending with the most recent political devel-

opments in Turkey. Through this elaboration, Anscombe aims at demonstrating how the swift state-identity transitions, from religious to national, which took place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, proved to be vulnerable in the course of the 1990s across the region. However, without further examination of how territories, or the identities of people living in certain territories, were constructed through the process of nation-building, this remains primarily a political observation, having little in common with what has been analyzed throughout the book.

Anscombe ends his book by engaging in an extensive political analysis of the recent history and current developments in the Middle East. He elaborates on the state ideologies used to legitimate states, employing a general political analysis to the region. Although imposed by tight state control of the population, Arab nationalisms failed to establish any legitimacy among the population. On the other hand, Arabism lost all political legiti-

macy as it was primarily created as an anti-European ideology. Consequently, Islam still prevails in the eyes of the population as a moral legitimizer of the state.

In conclusion, Frederick F. Anscombe's book is a truly valuable piece for anyone interested in late Ottoman political history, and acquiring a general introduction into the topics covered by the book. It reshuffles many cards and opens many questions for further studies. The questions posed by the author, and his reassessments of sources and narratives about the emergence of the post-Ottoman states are of extreme importance. However, the book seems to be over-ambitious, encompassing both an analysis of the post-Ottoman Balkans and of Turkey, as well as the post-Ottoman Middle East, on one side, and on the other, elaborating on both the processes of nation-state building and contemporary politics. This ambition resulted in a lack of attentiveness to the transitional period, where the main argument of the book and its contribution is placed.