

Editorial

Some imagine the world as consisting only of sovereign nation states defined by membership in the United Nations. This idea also feeds the interest in transnational histories, which share the interest in border-crossing flows with other approaches in global history, but at the same time contribute to the fact that the spatial format of the sovereign nation state retains its central position in the imaginings of globally effective spatial orders. A glance at the contemporary world alone makes it abundantly clear that at most only a part of the spatial configurations is represented by this imagination, and a glance at their history makes the picture even more complex.

The term transregional studies has been used in an attempt to better address the complexity of the situation, in that the transnational plays an important role, but can by no means capture the totality of border-crossing processes.

This thematic issue of *Comparativ* approaches the challenges transnational studies are confronted with in three very interesting ways. First, it looks at the Ottoman Empire, an imperial construction that was transformed into a nation state without imperial ambitions, encroachments, and expansions only relatively late in its history (and still not completely... when only thinking of the Kurdish question or the engagement of current Turkey in Syria). Second, it is about the co-constitution of this empire through its manifold contacts in and to other parts of Europe (and of course far beyond). Third, in order to be able to grasp these transregional contacts, encounters, exchange processes, cultural transfers, perceptions, and appropriations, the authors take a broader view and do not orientate themselves on the borders of countries such as Germany, Austria, and Switzerland (even in the period under study anything but fully territorialised nation-states!), but rather group them together as a kind of cultural space defined primarily by language: the Germansphere.

This extremely fruitful approach creates an exciting perspective, which is demonstrated in the individual articles, but it should also be appreciated in its methodological fruitfulness, because such a model can easily be transferred to other world regions. The hybrid political spatial format of the nation-state cum empire is not limited to the British and French case in the nineteenth century but can be observed wherever old imperial and colonial ambitions are revived. This format is not only reminiscent of the imperial past

of state-building processes, but also of the unfinished nature of territorialisation, if one understands the latter (with Charles S. Maier) as the complete focus on definitive border formation, as the opening up of territory through technical as well as social infrastructures, and as the control over the population of the territory enclosed by these borders. On the other hand, there is a type of spatial configuration that is oriented towards language, cultural belonging, and many related processes of identification. The repertoire thus proclaimed has also long played a major role in processes of inclusion and exclusion, but also, as this issue excellently demonstrates, in the organisation and communication of encounters.

In this respect, this issue is an invitation to get to know the relations between the Ottoman Empire and the Germansphere in the diversity of examples, which have hitherto hardly been considered together, but also to make productive use of the methodological expansion of transregional studies.

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