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**SARAH BALDWIN:** Across the world, nationalism is on the rise. Under President Erdogan, Turkey has seen a rise in state power, militarism, and authoritarian control. This week on Trending Globally, we're bringing you an interview with three sociologists. All of whom study nationalism and state formation. They argue that looking back to the early 20th century at the origins of nationalism in Turkey can help us understand global politics today. Muge, Svenja, Yasemin, thank you for coming in today.

**FATIMA MUGE** Thank you for having us.

**GOCEK:**

**SVENJA** Thank you.

**KOPYCIOK:**

**YASEMIN** Thank you.

**BAVBEEK:**

**SARAH BALDWIN:** Fatima Muge Gocek is a professor of Sociology and Women's Studies at the University of Michigan. Her book, *Denial of Violence* is about the 1915 Armenian Genocide. In it, she uses the term ontological nationalism to explain the founding of the Turkish Republic. Muge, I wanted to start with this notion of ontological nationalism. How is that different from plain old nationalism? I know you are studying it in the context of Turks and Kurds, but I'm sure it has broader applications. Can you talk a little bit about that?

**FATIMA MUGE** Of course. Well, nationalism is interesting because of course for two reasons. One is that it is an imagined community. So it's the imagine part of it, which is important, and a community that doesn't exist naturally in quotations, but rather one that is put together around an idea or an ideology, and it's how that imagination works to construct the community that becomes very important.

The second part of it has to do with the exclusions and inclusions that you have to undertake in constructing that community. And that is why I think nationalism is a very good way, analytically, to study inclusions and exclusions of social groups in our society. And we do know that nationalism has a violent side because those who are excluded usually face a lot of

different things. Usually not very pleasant, and they do so from the vantage point of the states because the state excludes them and then by doing that, legitimates, to a certain degree, the violence.

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I study violence because my social justice objective is to make sure everyone is able to participate in a society or an imagined community, not in accordance with the state or others want them to do, but in accordance with their own wishes and desires and visions. I have written a book called denial of violence about violence against the Armenians, and how Armenian Genocide basically came to be. I mean, how violence had sustained itself for a very long time. But that, of course, happened during the Ottoman times. And as a consequence, it wasn't a part of the Republican narrative, but it was actually a foundational violence that enabled the Republican era to succeed.

So I said, there must be an exclusion here that is so strong that they are not even defined as the other, I mean, they're literally defined out of the boundary of the imagined community. And that's why I came about ontological because it basically doesn't take even their being into account. And when I was thinking about that, I always am afraid of Orientalism, and I don't want people to say, well, these are the crazy Turks again, and that's why they're doing what they're doing because there are those who say that Turks are, by inclination, difficult people and violent people.

So I thought, well, what would be the analogy in the American context? And then I said, well, if you think about the United States and how it came to be. I mean our founding narrative is one that is very much centered around white settlers coming here, our founding fathers, and all of that. This wasn't tabula rasa. There were lots of Native Americans who were here, but we, I think, in a very similar way, ontologically erased them too.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** Svenja, you study Western Europe. Do you see this applicable in contemporary Western Europe? Svenja Kopyciok is a researcher studying right-wing populism, Islam and politics, and migration.

**SVENJA KOPYCIOK:** I think I see more a rise of ethnic nationalism, or ethno nationalism in the context because let's say in the case of Europe now, Muslims are often constructed as the other. But there is a recognition that they are part of the community, I don't want to say part of the nation, because

they are excluded from the nation, but they are still seen as the others, so the nation is constructed as opposed to Muslims as the enlightened west.

**FATIMA MUGE** What is very surprising to me though is that all Europeans think that history does not matter as to why these people arrived when they did and where they did because if you think about it, I mean, we have very strong imperialism through the 19th and 20th centuries. So these are all people from former colonies. I mean they didn't just happen to come to Europe because they came to Europe because it was the Metropolitan, they were in the periphery. But of course, that history is very similarly ontologically dismissed, so that you know the French say, why are the Algerians coming? Well I can tell you why if you know the history.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** Well actually, I was thinking about this notion of constructing a narrative. You tell your own story, and you exert control through the story and what you teach your children and what children learn in school, so don't all nations do this?

**FATIMA MUGE** Yeah I mean, you can talk, yes, I mean if you want to about the Turkish educational system since you went through it, right?

**YASEMIN** Yeah, I was thinking about this notion of denial that *The Denial of Violence* book talks about theorizes upon. And it talks a lot about the foundational violence of the founding of the Turkish society, the imagination of the Turkish society and the state and the reproduction of that denial through generations by, for example, Turkish educational system that erases all traces of either Kurdish or Armenian or Greek involvement within the communities.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** This is Yasemin Bavbek. A researcher studying nationalism and state formation.

**YASEMIN** So the nation becomes just a possession of the Turkish people who are defined as Turkish.  
**BAVBEEK:** And Gocek check talks about the emotional aspect of this and what does it do to the moral fabric of our society and what does it do to democracy. Can you actually achieve true democracy by denying such violence in the foundation of the republic?

**FATIMA MUGE** Yeah, that's true. It's fascinating when I talk to non-Turks in Turkey. I mean, for example, Armenians, who've been there for a very long time, actually in Asia Minor before the Turks arrived, they say, when they're on the streets and people say, oh, yeah what's their name or in the taxi, and they tell their name and they say, oh, and when did you arrive in Turkey? Thinking they're recent arrivals and they feel like, hey, we've been here before you people. I mean, so in a way, likewise, I mean, I had no idea there were Armenians because in our

educational system, they don't at all figure out, I mean, or what we did to them or anything. So it is of course terrible that they are all written out of history.

**YASEMIN** And also there is also this dimensional diffusion. Diffusion of displacement from, for example,  
**BAVBEK:** Turkish displacement from Balkans, Armenian displacement massacres, genocide from the Asia Minor, and then displacement of Assyrians, for example, in other parts of the world. So these displacements are also coming from denials of displacement and reproducing the same mechanisms over and over again.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** Yasemin, can I ask you when, do you remember the moment when you noticed or understood the discrepancy between what you had been taught and what the reality, the truth, was?

**YASEMIN** I think in the college education. There were of course traces of ambiguity or like things don't fit  
**BAVBEK:** together when you listen to national historiographies, there are lots of questions that arise from-- there is lots of silence on things that are glaring sciences, so when you actually think about it, you notice that something is very amiss in this whole narrative about the construction of the Turkish Republic.

**FATIMA MUGE** I'm very interested, Svenja, about how you came about critical thinking. Did you get your  
**GOCEK:** education in Germany?

**SVENJA** Yeah, I did.

**KOPYCIOK:**

**FATIMA MUGE** Now that would be interesting too, because obviously there at least you have acknowledged  
**GOCEK:** violence and the Holocaust, but people now argue that that coverage also is problematic.

**SVENJA** Yeah I think I actually did come through to critical thinking and the questions related to  
**KOPYCIOK:** discrimination, exclusion, et cetera, because of the Holocaust. And I grew up with talking about the Holocaust throughout all my school education basically. So--

**SARAH BALDWIN:** Well, arguably, Germans do it best.

**SVENJA** Yeah, we do it best, but now, a lot of people argue that it's overdone, so people get tired of it,  
**KOPYCIOK:** right? And my generation still had grandparents who lived through that time, so it was very close to us and people we loved were intricate in what happened, in history. And so for me, it was I felt it was necessary to digest it and to talk about and be aware of it and even feel a certain guilt.

But people who are even 10 years younger than me who don't know their grandparents anymore or their grandparents were not in the war, it's very different for them. So they get very tired of going over and over it again.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** Does it create a backlash? Or might it?

**SVENJA** Yeah, yeah. I think people are tired of feeling guilty for something that they didn't commit. And  
**KOPYCIOK:** when I talk to friends in other countries in Europe, they're like, why are you feeling bad about the Holocaust, it was not you who committed it?

**SARAH BALDWIN:** Muge, your last book, *Denial of Violence*, I guess informed how you are approaching your work with the Kurds, and I was very interested to hear you talk last night about learning Kurmanji, but even for the last book, reading over 300 memoirs to understand I guess how Turks go about denying so effectively the genocide. And that as an act of democracy or equality or a gesture of social justice or something, can you talk a little bit about that?

**FATIMA MUGE** Oh, well, I mean, in a moment of madness is when I decided for me, the denial of the  
**GOCEK:** genocide or violence against the Armenians by the Turkish state was understandable to a certain degree, because states have no hearts and they always put their real interests before everything else. But what I was unnerved about was Turkish society. I mean, how could society go along with this violence?

And I said, well, because of that, I'm not going to use state documents alone, but everybody was fighting over those documents as if they contain the truth. Well, they contain some parts of it, but they were state documents, obviously. And how do I get them to what people thought? And I said, well, very great. I'll do the memoirs. I had no idea how many memoirs there were, so I had to read like 700 or so, I was trying to basically capture the collective opinion that formed through the memoirs, then I made a list of all the ones that mentioned collective violence, Armenians, and violence, and that is how I ended up with the 350.

And in there were some Kurdish memoirs, and also because it was from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic, I also saw that after the Armenians were decimated and destroyed, Kurds emerged as the new other in the republic and started having the same kind of violence. So once I was done with the Armenian book, I said, well, now it's time to look at the Kurds. But of course there are still about 20% of the population, so I couldn't, as an ethnic Turk, study the Kurds without learning their language, at least out of respect, if not anything else.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** That's so interesting. I'm interested because Svenja, you're German and you study Western Europe here.

**SVENJA** Here.

**KOPYCIOK:**

**SARAH BALDWIN:** And you're Turkish and you study Turkey here, and you're Turkish and--

**FATIMA MUGE** Who knows where you go.

**GOCEK:**

**SARAH BALDWIN:** So I'm wondering, does the distance affect your scholarship? And if so, in what way?

**FATIMA MUGE** Well, you are the one whose future is at least most in doubt, so where do you've position yourself?  
**GOCEK:**

**YASEMIN** Well, it's very hard for me to actually position myself somewhere at this point because I am in  
**BAVBEK:** US academia and Turkish academia is in a very precarious situation at the moment, and it's very hard to gauge what the future of Turkish academia is going to be. Lots of academics have left Turkey for Europe or the US, so it's a very in-between situation I'd say.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** No, it must be incredibly precarious.

**FATIMA MUGE** Oh, yes.

**GOCEK:**

**YASEMIN** So it also affects the scholarship. If you are going back to Turkey traveling to Turkey all the  
**BAVBEK:** time, it's kind of what you do politically in your work.

**FATIMA MUGE** You have to self censor. I mean, which is terrible, and I, of course, don't have to do that. But  
**GOCEK:** when I went back to do my dissertation work and later other work, they said to me in Turkey, why did you have to go all the way to America to study these things, you could have done them here, but you couldn't because you don't have freedom of expression and thought.

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**SARAH BALDWIN:** Can you talk about why you can't go back?

**FATIMA MUGE** Oh, yes, because I signed this peace petition in January 2016 about stopping the violence

**GOCEK:** against the Kurds and adopting a diplomatic way of negotiating with them rather than killing them. 2,200 people did mostly academics, and the day after, our esteemed president Recep Tayyip Erdogan said, that we were all guerrillas, Kurdish guerrillas, and there was no difference between the machine gun of a guerrilla, and the pen of an academic, and that was that, right?

**YASEMIN** I remember that.

**BAVBEK:**

**SARAH BALDWIN:**Such rhetoric. Wow.

**FATIMA MUGE** It is such a-- and since then, I figured I already was suspect because of the work I did on the

**GOCEK:** Armenian, violence against the Armenians.

**SARAH BALDWIN:**I didn't realize it was so recent that you couldn't go back.

**FATIMA MUGE** Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. I was last there in November 2015.

**GOCEK:**

**SARAH BALDWIN:**And Svenja, how does the distance from Western Europe affect your scholarship?

**SVENJA** I also feel like I'm more in between the two countries. So while I'm an academic year, I'm also  
**KOPYCIOK:** we are usually home in our-- well, Yasemin and I, at least, are usually home for four months a year, so while I'm here doing the work, I'm still there and doing the research. So for me, I'm really in between, so--

**SARAH BALDWIN:**So in a way, it might be giving you perspective, it might be giving you just enough distance?

**SVENJA** Yeah, exactly. I think--

**KOPYCIOK:**

**SARAH BALDWIN:**But not disconnected.

**SVENJA** Yeah.

**KOPYCIOK:**

**FATIMA MUGE** But that whole concept of in between this is a very interesting concept because nationalism,  
**GOCEK:** especially and modernity, makes sure that you belong somewhere. And then for a long time for me, it was very difficult because I didn't belong in Turkey anymore, obviously, and I don't

belong here fully either because I'm an American immigrant, I'm a newcomer, right?

So how do you then make a sense of this in between, and that's I think why critical sociology is so helpful in a way by taking a critical approach you say, well, that in between us is not a liability. It could be an asset because of the way it positions you in between these two societies, and you can be almost an interlocutor in between the two of them, right? I mean, hopefully maybe you'll get the job in Europe, that would be [INAUDIBLE].

**SARAH BALDWIN:** I'm just going to look over these questions. I want to make sure we don't miss anything. Oh, I know one thing we haven't talked about is where gender and intersectionality fits into all of this? Can you talk a little bit about that?

**FATIMA MUGE GOCEK:** Of course, so when you look at ontological nationalism or this hegemonic narratives that dictate our lives, obviously, it's very destructive. And it doesn't allow any space for anyone other than the majority to exist. So how do we create these spaces? I think we create them first by demonstrating the public invisibility of the people who are excluded in this very dramatic way through ontological nationalism, and Kimberly Crenshaw and Patricia Collins talk about metrics of domination and then later intersectionality as a way to highlight black women, specifically.

Because the black women are not a part of the civil rights movement dominated by black men or women's movement dominated by white women. So if you look at it intersectionality, through their vantage point, then you become aware that there is a space. These people exist, but they don't have a public space within which to carry out their conversation. So that is why I brought gender, and again, to study internationalism in Turkey and Kurdistan to create this space and make people aware of it.

I said, well this is how they're doing it, let's see what happens in the case of Turkey. And suddenly, you find all these amazing practices that Kurdish women are doing at the moment in the name of gender equity, and the Turkish women cannot engage in it at all because they are into this whole ontological nationalism thing, which if they lifted that off of their minds, then they could get into conversation and all women in Turkey regardless of their race or ethnicity, would benefit from it.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** Right? Because gender is the broadest, I mean, they're all women, but they're divided by these--

**FATIMA MUGE** Islamists, secularists, on the Turkish side, and then the Kurdish women, of course, are  
**GOCEK:** marginalized there. And there are the ones who are guerillas and they're the activists.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** Are you optimistic that?

**FATIMA MUGE** The only thing that makes me optimistic is people like Svenja and Yasemin because at least  
**GOCEK:** there's a future. I mean, a critical future. I mean our generation I always tell my students, we messed things up. Good luck to you. But hopefully, they are the ones who will find solutions because I'm, at the moment, I cannot see a way out of Turkey. I don't know if I'll ever be able to go back, but we'll see. At least you're going back that's important, right?

**SARAH BALDWIN:** How do both of you and of course Muge as well, how do you see yourself within and beyond the Academy? I mean, do you see activism as part of your role as academics or not? Are you the same person when you're in your scholarship as you are when you're home just being a person? Yasemin.

**YASEMIN** OK. Well, I think the political activism of a person shouldn't be separated from the academic  
**BAVBEEK:** part of a person, so the academic, as a person, has responsibilities to the publics that she is writing for or writing against, whichever alignments she's seeking. But also, it's very important to reflect on the academics own position and power position of the academic herself, these are the other groups that she's engaging with.

For example, in terms of knowledge production, the academic should be very aware of where she's standing in terms of having institutional support, and that brings a certain responsibility to not impose an academic type of knowledge into or categorize people into academic categories, rather than listening to what's going on and partnering with people, for example, in search for a better democracy, for example.

**SVENJA** And that depends. I mean, we're both from Turkey, Yasemin and I, but when I give talks,  
**KOPYCIOK:** usually I do have Turkish students come to me and say, we are so glad you're expressing this as a senior professor. And I say to them yes, as a junior person, you do not have yet the weight to be able to pull that off because they're in much vulnerable positions. I mean we should be the ones doing the fighting. If you're a bystander, Hannah Arendt would say, you help reproduced the system.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** I want to thank you all for coming in today. This was fascinating, and I wish you continued success in your scholarship.

**SVENJA** Thank you very much.

**KOPYCIOK:**

**YASEMIN** Thank you.

**BAVBEK:**

**FATIMA MUGE** Thank you, and I think we are building a community and that's the most important thing. And I  
**GOCEK:** think Brown University in general and Michael Kennedy, in particular, has a vision that definitely does serve into creating this imagined critical community that doesn't take things as they appear for granted, but rather questions them.

**SARAH BALDWIN:** Thank you for that.

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