

# Istanbul Bilgi University

Jean Monnet Chair of  
European Politics of Interculturalism  
Department of International Relations  
European Institute

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## **History writing in Turkey and Greco-Turkish Population Exchange**

**Cansın İlgen**  
Istanbul Bilgi University  
European Studies MA Candidate



**Jean  
Monnet  
Chair**



**Istanbul  
Bilgi University**  
LAUREATE INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITIES

Istanbul Bilgi University European Institute Hacıahmet Mahallesi Pir Hüsamettin Sokak No:20 34440 Beyoğlu  
Tel.+90.212.3115260 Fax. +90.212.2508748 <http://eu.bilgi.edu.tr>

***History writing in Turkey and Greco-Turkish Population Exchange***

Plurality of identities is relatively a latecomer debate in Turkey. From the early Republican Era to up until now, Turkish history writing- call it as national historiography- has reinforced and intensified a homogeneous society image. As any other nation-state, Turkey also have its grand narrative in which some groups were labeled as “enemy”, some were backstabbers, some other were the brothers like Anzacs.

Within subjectivity and self-perception, any nation come to grant a legitimacy to its own actions. One of the significant points of the grand narratives has been to name their struggle in a heroic language. To use language of victory, to prefer “conquer”, to name Turkish-Greek War as Turkish Independence War are a few examples from Turkey's grand narrative of history.

Until very recently, different self-identifications had barely found open rooms for themselves in Turkey. From early Republican Era onwards, heterogeneity and diversity were not encouraged and steps taken toward homogenizing the Turkish nation had been the marker of the first decades of the Republic.

Fortunately, from 1990s onwards challenges have emerged against national historiography and grand narrative. Family narratives, memoirs, personal accounts, they all stand for voicing the silences. The outgrowth of various genres, historical novels went hand in hand with increasing interest in the past. People recognized the necessity of writing history from a personal level, to see themselves in events which directly affected them. Besides the interest in individual experiences, there appears a changing paradigm in comprehending the past, the present and the future. It seems that the past is no more to enlighten the future but vice versa. The questions of “who are we?” and “upon what will we elevate ourselves?” cause the growing interest in the past and give mission to the future to enlighten the past. With their future expectations, people and the states are more eager to look at the past and to uncover hidden parts of it.

This kind of paradigm shows itself in a bunch of TV series, books, historical novels. Despite the recalling the past is not freed from institutionalized history-writing in Turkey, the growing interest in the past soon produced nostalgia as well as brought out plurality or polyphony into nationalist official historiography. As a result, a move away from homogenized identities in official historiography occurred.

In this paper, my focus will be Turkish history-writing and I would like to analyze it via Greco-Turkish population exchange. My aim is to point out silences, ignorances in Turkish history-writing about the population exchange. I will try to exemplify policies of discouragement by Turkish state towards *mübadil* as well as policies of Turkification upon which I will formulate my main argument. Ultimately, my question will be why not to categorize Greco- Turkish population exchange as crime against humanity. But first I would like to talk about Greco-Turkish population exchange and its aftermath.

In the aftermath of Turkish-Greco war, the legacy of Union and Progress resurfaced. The governing elite was shifting their policy in Turkification process. Necessary arrangements for Turkification settled with the draft of Lausanne treaty and on 30<sup>th</sup> January 1923, the officials of Greece and Turkey signed it. For Mustafa Kemal, it was urgently important, because their recognition by world leading actors was depending on it. Thereafter, it became a milestone on the future of both Turkey and Greece.

Turkification was not a phenomenon of Republican era. Some scholars assume that Turkey and its newly introduced political system were a rupture from the legacy of the Ottoman Empire. However, founders of Turkey is also an outcome of their predecessor. In this sense, they were carrying the mentality, vision of their ancestors.<sup>1</sup> Therefore after achieving the strings of the country, governing elite lost its interest on plural, heterogeneous society and left them aside, later the project had started. In this project Mustafa Kemal's political agenda was to create country with standardized identity, culture, religion but even though Ottoman Empire lost many parts of its territory, Turkey at that time was a home of significant amount of diversity. This was an obstacle on their social transformation. Furthermore this newborn country created for a devoted community so the future of non-Muslim and Muslim's path crossed with this transformation.

Standardization of the society was not an easy task. For governing elite, it required social construction and primary task was set on extracting aliens within the society and converting the rest . Originally, the project was the Turkification of the economy but it evolved to the creation of country where citizens enjoy equal rights and define themselves first and foremost as Turks while keeping their religion a private matter.

The Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 was declaring an exchange. With agreeing this treaty, two country become a collaborator of a crime. Statistics reveals that, at least four hundred thousand Muslims who lived in Greece forced to leave and resettle in Turkey. On the other side, over one million two hundred Orthodox Christians who lived for generations in the regions of Turkey set to relocate in Greece. According to criterion of the agreement; exchange plan was defined under not ethnicity or mother language but by religion. Article One in the Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations and Protocol states:

As from the 1st May, 1923, there shall take place a compulsory exchange of Turkish nationals of the Greek Orthodox religion established in Turkish territory, and of Greek nationals of the Moslem religion established in Greek territory. These persons shall not return to live in Turkey or Greece respectively without the authorisation of the Turkish Government or of the Greek Government respectively.

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1 Kieser, Hans Lukas, *Turkey Beyond Nationalism : Towards Post-Nationalist Identities*, 5.

For this reason, even Karamanlis who are traditionally Turkish speaking but Greek Orthodox religion forced to depart from their homeland of Karaman and Cappadocia to Greece.<sup>2</sup> While exiling non- Muslims, Mustafa Kemal's thoughts for incoming migrants is intriguing. He was calling them as the national memories of the lost homelands.<sup>3</sup> However, Turkish state was formally established with the Lausanne Treaty which was formed by the idea of Misak-i Milli so it is sign of a conflict among the vision of the state and feelings of Mustafa Kemal but this is the sole discourse of Turkish state regarding on refugees and migrants.

How was population exchange between Turkey and Greece proposed by historiography? Till this date, the two country used various ways of manipulating the collective memory. In this sense, they were undertaking the task of covering their social construction by engineering the collective memory. Politics of that period show us which paths taken by the parties. Between 1924 and 1928, Greece had experience five government. At that time, the situation of refugee's was dire. Consequently, it became a critical element on government's agenda. This was raising the importance of refugee vote and thus shaping the political life of Greece. For example in 1924, Venizelist deputies were identifying the refugee problem as a gigantic social problem which is the most national of all issues. On the other hand, the Anti-Venizelists parties formulated an anti refugee approach. These static positions of Venizelists and Anti- Venizelists continued until 1930; the Ankara agreement.<sup>4</sup> With reference to this information, the refugee experience of Greece was visible and kept alive in the collective memory.

Policymakers of Turkey, chose a different approach. The things happened in population exchange were not allowed to be discussed by publicly. Therefore the state tried to silence the refugees of the population exchange. The attitude shown to refugee adaptation is reasonable evidence of this will. For instance, activities of refugee organizations were discomforting the government. In order to put an end to this, government did not hesitate to close and ban them. On 6<sup>th</sup> of November 1924, minister of internal affairs of Turkey issued a speech in parliament, regarding this concern. According to him, population exchange was over and the separatist actions from the refugee organizations was similar to the dispute between Muslim and non-Muslims in prewar era in early 1900s.<sup>5</sup> For this reason, minister was declaring that this action cannot be tolerated by the government due to the bitter memories of Turkey.

Examination of this speech reveals some truth behind government's action. Refugee's

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2 Hirschon Renee, *Crossing the Aegean*, 42.

3 Alpan Aytek Soner, "But the Memory Remains: History, Memory and the 1923 Greco-Turkish Population Exchange," 210.

4 Yildirim, "The 1923 Population Exchange, Refugees and National Historiographies in Greece and Turkey," 48.

5 Alpan Aytek Soner, "But the Memory Remains: History, Memory and the 1923 Greco-Turkish Population Exchange," 209.

perceived not as citizens but separatist entity. Subsequently, ministry giving signals about state's desire for forgetting this experience. This operation framed under the context of history. State's objective is to shut the voice of refugees and direct a historiography with narrative of national independence which supervised by the state.

Erasing the past and homogenizing identity, this was the mind behind in Turkification which Turkish state taken its initiatives to use towards different areas.<sup>6</sup> In 1928, a new campaign was launched. It was promoting the use of Turkish language in public space. "Citizen, speak Turkish!"<sup>7</sup> The target of this campaign was those whose mother tongue was not Turkish as well as groups like Jews, Armenians, Greek Orthodox but the campaign also targeted Cretan Muslims who came by population exchange and did not necessarily speak Turkish. There were constraints to use other languages in restaurants, trams, theaters. Rıfat Bali points out that there were Turkish municipalities such as Balıkesir and Bergama, fined those who did not speak Turkish in public during 1920s.<sup>8</sup> Bergama and Balıkesir were the resettlements of large groups of *mübadil* arriving from Greece. Balıkesir took in 33,132 refugees, approximately 15% of the total coming to Turkey.<sup>9</sup>

Rıfat Bali points out that it is also around this period Turkish Criminal Code article 159 was enacted and "Türklüğü tahkir" ("insulting Turkishness") was made a crime.<sup>10</sup> This law also shows intention of protecting state-sponsored Turkishness. "Citizen, speak Turkish!" campaign did not last very long, although it relaunched numerous times.<sup>11</sup> This campaign and the penal code both manifests official conceptualization of public sphere as well as the control of activities in public domain.

Greek refugees was always able to write their stories but this was not possible for the Turkish refugees. Furthermore, scholars were not putting any effort to take this case into the historical narrative of the nation. Information about the refugee was also negatively affected by scarcity. There is only two type of sources available about this event. First there are the publications of Refugee Associations of Rumelia but these were financed by Ottoman and Turkish governments. These documents only contain detailed information about Greek atrocities. They were prepared to be used in possible revelation of the ruthlessness of Greek policy in Rumelia and Anatolia. Secondly, articles from newspapers might be used as material but their relation to the state diminishes their scientific value. These days insufficiency of materials is less problematic than before. Now growing number of memoirs and some oral history studies are in use of academicians.

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6 Hirschon Renee, *Crossing the Aegean*, 90–93.

7 Igsiz, "Documenting the Past and Publicizing Personal Stories," 456.

8 Bali, Rıfat N, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri: Bir Türkles\*tirme Serüveni(1923–1945)*, 134–135.

9 Arı, Kemal, *Büyük Mübadele: Türkiye'ye Zorunlu Göç, 1923–1925*, 113.

10 Bali, Rıfat N, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri: Bir Türkles\*tirme Serüveni(1923–1945)*, 136–137.

11 Yıldız, Ahmet, *Ne Mutlu Türküm Diyebilene: Türk Ulusal Kimliğ'inin Etno-Seküler Sınırları (1919– 1938)*, 286–288.

12 Aktar, Ayhan, *Varlık Vergisi Ve Türkles\*tirme Politikaları*, 130–131.

These works enlighten the outcomes of population exchange in social, economic and cultural areas.

Political climate and constrained national historiography blocked the topic of Exchange until recent past which is interestingly one of the primary event in early republic era. While Turkish historiography is still struggling with this issue, Ottoman historiography enjoyed liberal and empirically oriented methodology but when it comes to the interpretation of Republican era, the ratio of quantity and quality significantly decreases. However, Greek academy put substantial effort on regarding the subject of exchange. Their public interest pushes it further, so both domestic and Greek diaspora publish remarkable amount of study on their tragic event while Turkish historiography provided only two primary sources within its lifetime. The first one is compilation of the official documents about the mixed commission and the other one is prepared by an anonymous author; it studies the resettlement policies guided by the government. These two publication, presented in the 1930s and except them, there had been no other standard reference regarding the Turkish-Greek Population Exchange.

After 1990's, world and every dimension of it started to change and Turkey was affected. This change promoted importance on issues such as human rights, minority rights and issues of democratization. Scholars from Turkey and abroad started to specialize in the early Republican era. In the case of population exchange, there was a division among scholars. One group was making their research by studying original archives. These works are in the favor of state sponsored, national narrative while some scholars chose to restudy the secondary sources. Their goal was presenting the population exchange with all its opportunities and constraints upon Turkey.

The first group might be identified as pro state discourse which was formed to block Greek national historiography about the population exchange and the refugees. Their thoughts are arranged around the mentality that defends population exchange as being beneficiary for the Turkish state. This narrative proposes ethnic homogeneity, positively effected the stability of the nation . According to them, country's physical entity, demography and economy achieved satisfying results by this event. Furthermore, they suggest incoming refugees not only contributed the economic development of Turkey but also extended the cultural variety of the nation. On the other side, scholars who are independent from state's influence, use new methodologies and also are aware of the scientific progress both in Greece and abroad , perform a critical approach to the founding elements of Turkish nation state. Those works successfully pinpoint social, cultural and economic consequences of the population exchange.

The population exchange was absent in the official memory in Turkey. Turkish nationalist history has ignored the questions of discrimination against the arriving communities, the exchanged Muslims were constructed with official history and they were expected to be melt in Turkish national identification pot.

The construction of “national self” and official discourses around it shows itself apparently in school textbooks. Textbooks are also sources for reproduction and consumption of public memory and they reflect the selective recollection of the past in accordance with the present.<sup>13</sup> The textbook of *Türk Tarihinin Ana Hatları* published in 1931 and used until 1941. The book emphasized the population change as a positive step towards Turkification of economic sphere and it defined the Greeks as blocking the “Turk's springs of talent” (Türkün yetenek pınarları). How the exchange took place and what happened to the refugees are the questions that are not covered in many books. *İnkılap Tarihine Giriş* (Introduction to the history of revolution) written by Yavuz Abadan says that both states managed to take the necessary measures to heal the wounds and furthermore two states' agreement on population exchange according to Abadan resulted in the peaceful resolution of centuries' long struggle.<sup>14</sup> Another textbook was widely used in 1980s and 1990s refers to the population exchange as “another important conflict resolved at the Lausanne Conference”.<sup>15</sup> It seems that the textbooks of 2000s remains far from critical approach. In one of the supplementary materials for high schools by Turkish Ministry of National Education, there is a mistake. According to the book; it was after Ankara Agreement in 1930, the population exchange took place. "Türk-Yunan ilişkilerini tehlikeli bir duruma getiren bu uyuşmazlık 10 Haziran 1930'da yapılan anlaşma ile giderilmiştir. Böylece nüfus mübadelesi (değiş-tokuş) gerçekleşmiştir"<sup>16</sup> In short, it could be said that the Turkish history textbooks examined the population exchange only in the context of Lausanne Agreement and simply approach it superficially without any questioning of its aftermath.

The Turkish state's approach seems to be neglectful of the effects of the population exchange. On 11 October 2008, Vecdi Gönül, then the Minister of National Defence referred to the population exchange as an important step in nation building process. On 17 August 2009 a former minister of foreign affairs Mümtaz Soysal wrote in his column in newspaper *Cumhuriyet*, the population exchange solved many of Turkey's past problems and in the future this solution could be applied to the Kurds living in the south-eastern regions of Turkey and the Turkomans living in the northern part of Iraq.<sup>17</sup>

The study I conducted left many impressions on me. First, from the early days, both nations took a stand to the population exchange. Circumstances forced Greek state to loosen its narrative about this event and its consequences, this ensured a more flexible research. However, Turkish state was concentrated on silencing the voices of exchange and sweeping the experience under the rug. With the help of institutions such as Turkish Historical Research Commission and later the Turkish

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13 Avdela Efi, “The Teaching of History in Greece,” 248.

14 Abadan Yavuz, *İnkılap Tarihine Giriş*, 81.

15 Eroglu Hamza, *Türk İnkılap Tarihi*, 201.

16 Öztürk Alim, *T.C. İnkılap Tarihi Ve Atatürkçülük*, 74.

17 Sosyal Mümtaz, “Kesin Çözüm,” 2.

Historical Society (Türk Tarih Kurumu) kept this course in motion.

Another problematic factor in this case is the fetishism of historians to the primary written sources. This methodology perceived as backbone of whole historiography but the dependency on state evidence in nation state's leads to reproduction of state narratives. It promotes a history by the perception of the state but sacrifices the truth. Thus, solely dependent on the documents provided by national archives, makes difficult to get any results about the events in which nation state is a part of it.

There is no way of getting rid of the nationalist historiography; it takes its source directly from nation state, so as long as the nation state exist, there will be also the nationalist historiography. But changing dimensions of the world system after 1990s allowed contemporary social sciences to use different methods, look from different aspects. Oral history studies and literature became a prominent approach on reinterpretation of the history. Those works are shedding light to the unobserved so the untold stories happened in republican era.

Since not everyone supposed to be interested in history, the people may not have access to the truth. On the other hand, national education institutions are obligatory that everyone steps in, so the people are subjected to history provided by the state. Mustafa Kemal was also aware this factor and he promoted the education of literature as leading actor in development of Turkish child. His expectation was to educate the Turkish youth with idea of great Turkish ideal. This progress is continuing today in a different form but the goal is the same.

Paralyzed truths are tainting the education. In Germany, public opinion is conscious of their recent past. This awareness is leading them to prevent further problems regarding the identity and multicultural grounds of their society. It might not be a total success, because there are still some vital gaps on their mentality, public opinion, perspective but those progresses lessens their problematic approaches.

However in Turkey, besides some intellectuals and academicians, majority of the society indoctrinated by public education. They favor the state discourse on the history and homogeneity. This shapes them as hostile toward their created enemies and makes them the defender of Turkish ideals. For a person who lives in 21<sup>th</sup> century it might be seemed as irrelevant but this chain is continuing by reproducing and transferring itself to one generation and another. Therefore, as an international court, crime against humanity may be a suitable tool on tackling this progress. Today's scope of defining those crimes are too narrow but it should be widened. Even the death of ten people by the state should be defined as crime against humanity. When the co-operated crime of Turkey and Greece is comprehended by the public, not only the past but also the future will be saved.



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