

Creating Mnemonic Nations:

1923 Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey

As Otto Bauer claimed in the late nineteenth-century, “Each nation should form only one state. Each state should embrace only one nation.”¹ Hence, the dissolution of the multicultural Ottoman Empire not only disturbed the balance of power in Europe, but also signified the emergence of sharply defined nation-states founded on cultural, ethnic and religious unity. Born out of the ashes of such an empire and aspiring to become homogenous entities, Greece and Turkey had to encounter the problem of national minorities in the aftermath of the First World War. The governments of the two countries regarded a population exchange as the foremost imperative of building nation-states. As endorsed by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, about 400,000 Muslims were forced to move from Greece to Turkey, while at least 1.2 million Greek Orthodox Christians were shifted from Turkey to Greece. But what exactly did the population exchange mean to its subjects? How did it alter their perception of personal and national identity? Looking at various accounts of the population exchange, we realize that the Treaty of Lausanne’s objective of manipulating memory to create stronger national identities backfired. Fostering clandestine collective memories of their old homes, Greek and Turkish immigrants resisted new national identities, but struggled to resurrect the glorious past.

This summer, I had the opportunity to begin working on my senior project, analyzing the influence of the 1923 population exchange on the development of collective memory in modern Greece and Turkey. My project consisted of two parts:

¹ Quoted (and translated) in Dimitri Pentzopoulos, *The Balkan Exchange of Minorities* (Paris: Ecole Pratiques des Hautes Etudes, 1962). p.15.

First, I spent around six weeks (May 20-June 27) in Athens, involved in research and fieldwork. I dedicated most of my time to paying regular visits to the Center of Asia Minor Studies (Plaka, Athens). There, I was provided with a large and diverse collection of written accounts of the population exchange in Greek, English and Turkish. Also, through the help of the Center, I was able to establish connections with Greek archivists and scholars, like Nikos Marantzidis, who will be invaluable sources for me when I start writing my senior thesis. Two other institutions I became involved with during my time in Athens are DIKEMES and the Gennadius Library (the American School of Classical Studies in Athens). Similarly, I got in touch with Eleni Ioannidou, the director of the Archive for Refugee Hellenism in Kalamaria.

Throughout my research, I stayed in touch with my adviser, Giorgos Antoniou. Professor Antoniou suggested that I should postpone my visit to Thessaloniki, and that I should concentrate on doing fieldwork in Athens. Thus, I spent a significant portion of my time in Greece interviewing people with some firsthand knowledge of the population exchange.

The second part of my research took place in Istanbul, Turkey. During my time in Istanbul, I met Vangelis Kechriotis, who advised me on how to further organize my research and informed me of available sources in Turkey. Under Professor Kechriotis' guidance, I prepared bibliographies in Greek, Turkish and English. Also, in Istanbul I had the opportunity to meet with some Turkish scholars working on the subject, like Dilek Guven.

The Niarchos Foundation Research Fellowship allowed me to spend six productive weeks in Athens. I had the invaluable opportunity of accessing original

documents, meeting with prominent scholars, and conducting interviews. Also, my time in Athens helped me appreciate and understand the Greek culture and history in a more informed manner. I believe that thanks to all I learned last summer, I will be able to pursue my research interest even more diligently and passionately in the future.