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POPULATION UPROOTING AFTER WWI AND POLITICS OF MEMORY

EXPATRIATES FROM THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE TO
GREECE IN THE COURSE OF THE 20TH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to focus on the case of expatriates from the Ottoman Empire to Greece during the Interwar and discuss the ways they shaped and negotiated their memories in the course of the following decades so as to be included in the national narrative. It will explore the ways through which the experience was gradually nationalized and transformed into a national cultural trauma. Its main argument is that such a transformation was not a result of a linear process: it rather required the combination of multiple ways of dealing with the past, including writing history and historical practices, and various agents to become involved, in different historical contexts.

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EXPATRIATES FROM THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE TO GREECE IN THE
COURSE OF THE 20TH CENTURY

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INTRODUCTION

As the end of the Great War approached and immediately after the Armistice of 1918 Europe faced the largest population movement in its contemporary history. It was the result of the total reorganization of the world from an imperial to a national order, resulting in the transformation of inhabitants to citizens, refugees and minorities. While such movements were protracted as a rational solution for the optimized function of the newly formed nation states, they were in their majority experienced traumatically (Brubaker, 1995, pp 189-218). In most cases, the lens through which they are looked back to as exceptional was shaped by this traumatic experiencing. For example, Asia Minor Catastrophe and the exchange of populations is today a mnemonic topos for Greek national consciousness. Its traumatic character has elevated it through continuous resignifications to a core element of the national identity (Liakos, 2011). However, it has not always been this way. Its signification as field of memory is in need of historicisation itself.

The aim of this paper is to focus on the case of expatriates from the Ottoman Empire to Greece during the Interwar and discuss the ways they shaped and negotiated their memories in the course of the following decades so as to be included in the national narrative. In other words, to discuss the ways through which the experience was gradually nationalized and transformed into a national cultural trauma. Its main argument is that such a transformation was not a result of a linear process: it rather required the combination of multiple ways of dealing with the past and various agents to become involved, in different historical contexts. It was a slow multifocal process, within which different communities negotiated their experiences and memories in order to come to terms with what had happened and gain the ability to imagine a prospected future. However, if the past was to be renegotiated for the future's sake, especially a past so traumatically and emotionally loaded, historiography was not the only way to do so. Historical practices, literature, commemoration and memory are only some of the additional ways used to relate with the past that played a crucial role to the transformation of 1922 to a national lieu du memoir (Reckwitz, 2011). Furthermore, it wishes to

argue that memory was not always looking towards the same direction. After it was nationalized and included to the dominant discourse, it became politicized and turned towards the past instead of the future in an attempt to address the past in an ethical context of moral justification.

MEMORY, NOSTALGIA AND THE POLITICS OF MEMORY

Memory is central in contemporary historical discourse. Moreover, history and memory are already in a dialogical relationship since the Interwar, when the experience of the Great War and the dramatic change inflicted on everyday life because of industrialization and urbanization facilitated interest in memory: memory was a prerequisite for the present; it shaped the modern nation. At the same time, though, it longed for pre-modernity that was no longer there. This was the frame within which Halbwachs argued for the collectiveness and presentism of memory. He additionally argued that although both memory and history deal with the past, they differ in a very notable manner, since history holds the past discernible from the present, while memory functions in the opposite direction—that is—by keeping the past alive and contextualized in the present (Halbwachs, 1992). In the same direction, Assman discerns between communicative and cultural memory. By communicative memory he refers to the memory that is transmitted through the generations, while by cultural memory he refers to a more distanced past, which is transmitted through institutions, monuments and rituals (Assmann, 1989). In the same vein, Connerton underlines that memory is embodied and transmitted through participation in commemorative ceremonies (Connerton, 1989).

It was Nora though who inducted the nation into the debates on memory. Nora expanded the existing scholarship on collective memory, which referred mostly to communities that held in-between places between the individual and the nation, in order to elaborate on national memory. He argued that, although it is not possible to speak about a homogenous national memory, the collective memories of such communities that is articulated and transformed into a national memory, through the intervention of the “*lieux de mémoire*”. Sites of memory in this sense replace experienced communities and create, through rituals, a sense of community and co-belonging to the national imaginary. They, thus, serve the purpose of restoring the link between the past, present and future (Nora, 1984).

Gradually, interest in memory studies shifted from the result to the agents and the process. Hobsbawm and Ranger argued that national commemorations and rituals are practices that not only commemorate, but also construct and diffuse national traditions, serving as connection joints for the national memory (Hobsbawm, Ranger, 1983). Jay Winter moves the discussion further on, focusing

not only on the practices of the state, but on those of the agents, too, that shape and signify the narrative and the performative commemoration (Winter, 2010). Ann Rigney (2008), on the other hand, argues that more than the memory of what “really happened”, it is the narrative of what happened that forms collective memory. For similar issues, Marianna Hirsh (1997) introduces the notion of post-memory, referring to memories that do not relate to events experienced by the subjects, neither to ones they are only connected to through cultural memory, but to events they have emotionally invested to, through the experiences that were transmitted to them by the previous generations. Thus, agents emerge as central for the formation of the memory – as it is through them that narratives are diffused and resignified as performances. Focusing on the materiality of the interactions between agents and performances could lead to a broadening of the current understanding of history, focusing not on its meaning and the way it represents the past, but on the way, it functions and creates spaces for becoming (Gallant, 2012; Salvanou, 2013). This kind of materiality refers to the way agents act according to their discursive and practical consciousness, both of which are culturally constructed, and resignify the signifiers through repetition (Salvanou, 2012; Bevernage, 2009).

Connected to the discussion on memory is that on nostalgia. Initially, at the late 19th and early 20th century, nostalgia was perceived through medical terms. Gradually, though, in the post war decades and especially during the 1980's, nostalgia obtained cultural connotations. It was related to acceleration of historical time in late modernity and the fear of which identity would be lost. Nostalgia is thus directly linked to progress, perceived as its inevitable consequence. The necessary condition of its appearance is the simultaneous disappointment with the present and the realization that the past is definitively gone. According to Shaw and Chase, in such conditions, nostalgia functions as an invented tradition and restores the disrupted community ties (Shaw, Chase, 1989). Thus, nostalgia is written in a future past, but invents, in a present past, narratives of an anticipated future. In this framework, in terms of traumatic experiences, memory became nostalgic not for the experienced past, but for the cancelled potentials of that past.

A new wave of studies on nostalgia emerged after the Velvet Revolution and the collapse of the Communist regime. Svetlana Boym distinguishes between two types of nostalgia, which although they use more or less similar symbols, result in different types of narratives. (Boym, 2001). Restorative nostalgia sanctifies the past and aims to retain it unaltered. It is the kind of nostalgia that is usually related to the national past. Reflective nostalgia on the other hand is connected to an attempt to re-examine the past and usually affects individual and collective memory. When the issue combines both temporal and spatial distance, it is usually restorative nostalgia to which the subjects turn in order to

alleviate the pain of the trauma. In such cases, restorative nostalgia combines “cultural intimacy” with the need to make sense of the traumatic experience of the destruction of traditional ties and communities. It then creates “invented traditions”, which transcends the limits of preexisting national and ethnic restrictions (Boym, 2001, pp 42-43). At the basis of modern nostalgia it is the difficulty to accept change in historical time, in other words to accept linear, abstract time (instead of experienced time) as a measure of human life. Although such change may be understood, the human gaze is looking backwards (Shaw and Chase, 1989, p. 7).

“Looking backwards” and creating modern nostalgias is not unrelated to wider shifts in historical consciousness – i.e. in the way we make sense of the past and relate it to our present¹ In contemporary historical discourse, the quest for memory, in the form of heritage or debt towards the dead, has defined not only historical culture, but historical consciousness as well: cultural memory is regarded as the most genuine path towards identification. It has not always been this way though. In the course of history, memory and oblivion were both regarded as imperative. Depending on the context of the present, the need to forget was equally important to that of remembrance, and it was not rare that forgetting the past was the preferable choice in order to keep things going on as late as the 1970’s (Bevernage, 2009, p. 11-13). It was only the major changes that gradually culminated during the post-war era and so made the future unpredictable. The temporal continuity of historical consciousness was thus broken and the anticipation of the future (that made history meaningful) was substituted for the exploration of the past, in the quest of gaining meaning through tracing identity and continuity (Nora, 2002). Furthermore, the shadow of World War II and the Holocaust formed the conditions for re-contextualizing the discourse on trauma from psychoanalysis to history. It was the collective trauma of the western world that was invoked by the horrifying result of the process of rationalization. Thus, memory was connected to the trauma of utopias turned into dystopias and of chances lost and paths unfollowed. During the 1980’s, memory found its way to the political discourse and was then connected not only to identity, but to justice as well. Memory took the form of recognition of past damages, which was thought to redeem communities of the burden of their past (Liakos, 2011, 360-375).

¹ On historical consciousness: Rüsen, 2006

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Since the dawn of the 20th century, there has been increased mobility among populations of the Ottoman Empire. From the Balkans to Anatolia, the prospective of the Empire's collapse formed the conditions for ongoing wars between emerging nationalisms and a consequent movement of the populations, as the rule of their territories changed. However, such uprooting usually proved to be temporary and the groups affected returned to their homelands when circumstances changed. The Ilinden uprooting of 1903 was the starting point of a war adventure that affected all the nationalisms of the region and lasted until the end of the Greek-Turkish war and the Lausanne Treaty (1923) that determined the process of population exchange and the status of minorities. The Macedonian struggle, the Balkan wars, World War I and the following expenditure of the Greek Army at Asia Minor were the knot points of a period of clashes that lasted over a decade and reshaped the territorial organization of the Balkans and Anatolia. Favoring the prospect of national homogeneity and prosperity, massive uprooting of populations took place. Approaching and shortly after the end of the war, though, such uprooting became mandatory: its conditions was determined by Treaties, it was regularized and the population affected obtained the status of refugees and minorities. For the case of Greece, the knob point for the uprooting of populations from the Ottoman Empire and their fleeing to Greece as refugees was the defeat of the Army at Anatolia at 1922 and the signing of the Lausanne Treaty. Ottoman subjects of orthodox religion followed the army's retreat at 1922, terrified of the prospect of revenge by the kemalist troops, while the remaining of the orthodox communities were officially exchanged with the Muslims of Greece according to the terms of the Treaty.²

Refugees from the Ottoman Empire were far from being a homogenous group. They were divided by cultural, economic and social differences, differences that derived from the part of the Empire they were settled, the networks they participated in and the way they had come in touch with the nationalization process during the last decades. Additionally, they conceptualized their collectivity according to their local communities rather than in a more abstract way, making difficult the development of symbolically constructed community. Lastly, the way they had experienced expatriation in the different communities of Asia Minor and the Balkans differed so drastically, that it defined the memory of the whole experience.³ Moving between the state of having fled from a city in

² On forced migration as an aspect of the unmaking of the Ottoman Empire: Loizos, 1999

³ Such differences are evocatively described in the 3 volume collection of refugees' oral stories: *I Exodos*, Centre of Asia Minor Studies (1980, 1982, 2013) (in Greek)

flames to the state of having crossed the river Evros that was the border between Turkey and Greece carrying along the household belongings and staying there in order to cross the river again in the opposite direction when the situation was favorable, the way the uprooting was materialized shaped the experience and its memory as a whole.

However, the defeat of 1922 was traumatic for the Greek state as well. In its case, the trauma did not refer to the uprooting of the orthodox ottoman communities. The term “Catastrophe” was coined to define the military defeat at Asia Minor. The defeat was experienced as a disaster because it had put an end to the national aspirations (even if illusionary) for the reconstitution of an Empire. At the core of the national ideology for over a century was the Great Idea, which defined the policies undertaken by the Greek state and conceptualized the nation’s biography in terms of space and time. The prospected reconstitution the Greek-Byzantine Empire would restore the unity between past-present and a future of redemption. Under this scope, the army’s defeat at Asia Minor more than being an economic, political and military disaster generated a serious crisis in the way the nation identified itself and therefore, imposed the need to revisit the symbolic construction of the national community (Gazi, 2005).

THE INTERWAR YEARS AND FUTURE ORIENTATED MEMORY

Shortly after their settlement at Greece refugees realized that, although they were granted with citizenship, they were actually excluded from the national imaginary; they were discriminated and alienated (Giannuli, 1995). The state did not take the responsibility to include the newcomers neither to the national imaginary nor to its narrative. Their story was absent from the school curriculum and a cohesive narrative about what had happened to them was lacking (Koulouri, 2002). Official narratives addressed only the military defeat at Anatolia and totally left out the refugees’ experience. Their arrival to Greece had transformed them to people with no past, people whose identity could be condensed in their present condition of refugee-hood.⁴ Making their past visible, though, was imperative for the refugees. It was not a matter of working through their traumatic experience of dislocation. It concerned their future lives as part of the national imaginary. In a way that resembled a pattern, the Greek state incorporated the territories it gradually obtained by re-narrating the

⁴ See Malkki 1995, p. 518: *People who are refugees can also find themselves quite quickly rising to a floating world either beyond or above politics, and beyond or above history – a world in which they are simply “victims”. [...] It is this floating world without the gravities of history and politics that can ultimately become a deeply dehumanizing environment for refugees, even as it shelters*

regional histories and re-signifying the symbols into a national manner (Liakos, 2008; Peckham, 2000). This said, if the refugees planned to change their situation of alienation and make for themselves space into the national imaginary, they had to find a way to fit into the mosaic of the nation. In other words, they had to nationalize their narration of the past and align it with the rest of the regional stories. However, the refugees did not have a region to nationalize. How could the above-mentioned goal be achieved then? How would fragmented memories of individuals and communities be transformed into a collective memory with regional reference?

Shortly after the refugees' settlement in Greece, intellectuals originating from the regions refugees had fled – still already securely settled in Greece since some years and enjoying a high symbolic status in the state's institutions - took the initiative to found associations based on the regional origin of the refugees'. The regional division was established according to the ancient Greek regions of Anatolia, serving this way as a reminder of the connection between ancient history and the present and underling, in an aptly way, the hellenicity of the refugees. The front stage task that developed around the associations was facilitating the emergence of communities of memory. Regular meetings concerning the association and negotiation of experiences to make sense of them were central into transforming a group of people -which did not up to then acknowledge belonging to regional collectivity- into a community of memory. A number of initiatives, which was undertaken by the association, cultivated the sense of community. Obituaries, scholarships attributed to refugee pupils in economic need and grants to ensure the dowry of young ladies at the age of marriage, networks of scholars collecting materials and memories useful to construct a narrative of the past, were practices that strengthened the bonds among refugees originating from the same region and constructed the imagined community based on ethnic and regional origin (Salvanou, 2012).

The main practice though connected with the associations was the issue of journals, through which they renegotiated and nationally diffused a narrative on their regional past. Their project aimed to the practical past, to which refugees maintained an affective relation and to which they backdated in order to make sense of their present (White, 2010). However, the practical past is embodied and experienced: it consists not only from written history, but also from a series of practices that make history writing possible. The journals as practices were important not only because of their content but merely because of the materiality of their functioning. Regardless the result, the practices involved in publishing a journal, in the processes of their repetition form networks and contribute to the emergence of the subjectivities of the participants. In addition, the emergence of such a subjectivity was crucial for their future in a national context. Already from the first issues, the journals' orientation towards the practical past was clearly stated (Magriotis, 1928):

In this journal shall be trusted everything that is connected, directly or indirectly, with the life and the appearance of Thrace – written or oral, history, monumental, linguistic, tradition, custom. Every aspect of the natural, national, social, patriotic, handicraft, art or any else life of the Thracians will be part of this periodical, reflecting in this way the past and the present of the Thracian intelligentsia. And all of this aiming to help a future scientist to use this rich material in order to write a general history of Thrace from its historical appearance until today”

The nationalization of the past was the path that should be followed for their prospected future. Aspects from the distant and the most recent past of the refugees’ homelands were re-narrated in a way that made them fall into the national canon. During the Interwar, the past was not a cause for self-victimization. It was rather the backbone for planning the future.

THE POST-WAR DECADES: TESTIMONIES, NOSTALGIA AND POLITICIZATION OF MEMORY

Through the experience of the Second World War, the Resistance and the Civil War interwar divisions between refugees and locals were overcome, giving their place to new ones, based on political ideology and defining national inclusion. On the other hand, the emergence of testimony as a central category for approaching the historical experience did not leave the way refugees negotiated their past unaffected. Already at 1948, after many adventures, the Centre of Asia Minor Studies (CAMS) was founded at Athens. The Centre’s prehistory goes back to the Interwar, when the director, Melpo Merlie Logothesi, collaborating with the University of Paris, undertook the task to collect and record the refugees’ music tradition. The Center’s work radically transformed the way refugee history was written. It was based on grassroots approach and orality. That is to say, that on the one hand for the first time voice was given to ordinary refugees, their memories were valued, and on the other hand, that orality (and memory) claimed their place not as supplementary, but as alternative approaches to the past (Papailias, 2005; Yannakopoulos, 1993). The CAMS did not only enrich the field of refugee studies with new materials, but it transformed the way it was perceived. Collecting and recording the cultural characteristics of the refugees was the catalytic that transformed refugees and their memory to a collective subject.

The decade of 1960 coincided with the commemoration of the 40 years after the Asia Minor Catastrophe. Unlike earlier commemorations, this one was given much more space and visibility in the public discourse. In an environment of dominant anti-communism, the Left was left with few choices to disseminate its ideas apart from cultural production. Moreover, the discourse on 1922 was

under considerably less restrictions compared to other events of contemporary history that were considered milestones. Additionally, the government was uneasy about the commemoration, given that it wanted to smooth the tension between Turkey and Greece, because of the Zurich Treaty. In this context, the 1962 commemoration of the Asia Minor Catastrophe was marked by cultural production by the Left, which re-established the basis of the relevant narrative. Novels written for the occasion of this commemoration underline the use of memory and orality as crucial for understanding the authenticity of the experience. Novels such as D. Sotiriou, *Farewell Anatolia* and Kosmas Politis, *Stou Hatzifragkou* are indicative of the shift being accomplished. The narrative that these novels propose questioned the dominant nationalistic narrative and suggested that the different ethnicities coexisted peacefully in the Ottoman Empire and that the involvement of the Great Powers was a decisive factor for the developments in the region (Nikolopoulou, 2007).

Developments from the 1970s onward have resulted in a breaking up of the field of studies on Asia Minor Catastrophe. On the one hand, a strand developed in the framework of the academy and the series of turns that occurred in historiography. A different strand, based on the politicization of memory, developed mostly within the refugee associations and by historians who are in some way connected to such associations. In the remaining of this paper I will briefly refer to these new strands, keeping in mind that it seems that neither has completed its development yet.

The first strand, that cultivated in the academy, has been heavily influenced by the social turn in historiography and then by the cultural turn and the memory turn – recently by the performative turn as well. Scholars became interested in refugees not as a group in need for the state's intervention for their rehabilitation, but as an agent that interplayed in the shaping of the social condition. It was not the refugees compared to the indigenous, but the social identity of the refugees that now was becoming visible. Cultural and memory turn have proved turning points for the historiography of refugees. Apparently affected by methodologies of cultural anthropology, studies now focus on the subjectivity of the refugees and reveal the multi-levelness of their identity. Comparative approaches of the Turkish and Greek experience undertaken the recent years contribute to the formation of the study of the Asia Minor exchange as an autonomous historiographic field of the South-eastern contemporary history.

The second strand relies heavily on the politicization of memory. It was somewhere at the end of the 1960's when the refugees' mnemonic narrative became nostalgic. The first generation was gradually getting old and was thus looking back to the experience of expatriation as a part of their life-cycle, a part of their youth. The social and political situation had changed as well and the post war era imposed

new kind of problems for the future and new kind of discriminations among the population that washed away previous ones against the refugees. Thus, the refugees' nostalgia was reflexive: emotion and intimacy about a utopian past replaced accounts on the multi-faceted conditions at the Greek-orthodox communities at the Ottoman Empire.⁵ On the other hand, the associations were renewed by new members, the refugees' offspring, who were gradually joining in. They had not experienced the past, which the mnemonic narrative was referring to, but it was for them an isle of intimacy: they had grown up in refugee neighborhoods, where narrations about the life in the "lost homelands" and the expatriation ensured the passing on of memory (and identity). Gradually, these neighborhoods were withering, as economic development linked to the post-war decades and expansion of the cities with the simultaneous construction of block of flats led more and more families to leave the neighborhood for a modern dwelling. Thus, the disappearance of the frame that ensured a trans-generational passing over of the memory, called in the need of its cultivation – this time, though, as part of a cultural identity, or rather as heritage (Nora, 2002).

It was the broader culture of trauma that passed from psychoanalysis to cultural studies, which soon politicized the refugees' mnemonic narratives of expatriation (Liakos, 2007; LaCapra, 2001). During this period, refugee associations accused the state of having downgraded their grandparents' traumatic experience and of not having recognized their suffering to the proper extent. They claimed that their sufferings and expatriation should be recognized as a genocide, the spearhead of which was what had happened to the Pontiacs and comprised the other Anatolian Greeks as well. At this point, it was not the future that dictated avocation with the past, but an ethical quest of justice. Things climaxed further with the emergence of a new narrative on expatriation, aiming at replacing "Catastrophe" with "Genocide". Pontiacs and Anatolian Greeks in general were considered to be native in the region from the remote past, against which a genocide took place by the Ottoman Empire and the Young Turks. This narrative claimed its recognition from the Greek state, which in its turn established 14th September as the day dedicated to the memory of the Catastrophe, while at 1992 clergy that martyred during the last years of the Greek-ottoman communities were canonized. Two years later, both Pontiac and Asia Minor expatriation were declared genocides by the Greek parliament. According to speeches delivered in the Parliament, the Greek state ought to get over syndromes of the past and admit the historical truth: it should do justice to the refugees by recognizing their genocide (Exertzoglou, 2011).

⁵ On reflexive nostalgia: Boym, 2011.

From the above it is clear that the focus on memory cultivation after the 1980's was different from that during the Interwar. Contemporary memory was not future orientated: it aimed to "do justice" to the sufferings the ancestors underwent, and that could only be done through their victimization: a victimization that ought to be institutionalized, through practice (public rituals) and writing (inclusion in the history text books). This victimized version of the refugee narrative was not only included, but also became core to the national identity – and part of the historical culture of modern Greece. It was clear on the occasion of the memory war that outburst because of the 6th grade elementary textbook at 2006 and more recently in the reactions against a discussion concerning the anti-racist law at the Parliament, which at the same time banned negation of recognized genocides.⁶

CONCLUSION

What this paper hoped to show is that memory cannot be understood if not contextualized to the politics that define its emergence. The mnemonic narrative constructed during the Interwar was heavily defined by its orientation towards the refugee's national inclusion. It was not a memory that wished to do justice to the expatriates' experience, but to form their future in a viable manner. On the other hand, constructed as it was, it was this narrative that shaped the post-memory of the generations that followed. In their turn, living in a chronotope in which historicity is understood in new ways and the past is praised as such, they radicalized and politicized this narrative, in a quest to rectify the sufferings and save the past.⁷ On the other hand, though, the institutionalization of a radicalized narrative that is thought to do justice to a past that is determined a posteriori by a discourse of trauma might have a significantly negative impact in current international politics. Consequently, a question that would then emerge is which is the past that ought to be saved and under what conditions. Is it the Interwar's cohesive nationalized past, is it the 1970's nostalgic past, or is it the polemic past of the 1990's? There is no easy answer to the question, as each of these pasts relates to different needs of the subjects that constructed it. Anticipating a future, looking for roots in a cultural identity or feeling duty towards the dead, are all legitimized relations to temporality. There is no "real" past either, as it is in the bottom-line a matter of how an experience or a memory is subjectified – in memory it is the meaning of the past that matters. What is important to keep though is the way these different versions of the past remain in dynamic tension with the politics that

⁶ On the elementary textbook history-war: Liakos, 2008.

⁷ For the notion of chronotope: Bakhtin, 1981; White, 1987.

produced them. In other words, even if mnemonic narratives are important exactly because of the subjectivity they carry with them, it is important to contextualize them in wider frameworks, such as historical consciousness, in order to be able to evaluate the trends that formed their politics and therefore the impact they could possibly have.

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