

## The Greek Review of Social Research

Vol 113 (2004)

113 A´ Special Issue: Social change and segregation trends in European cities. Editor: Thomas Maloutas



Renée Hirschon (ed.), 2003, *Crossing the Aegean. An Appraisal of the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey. Studies in Forced Migration, Volume 12*, Oxford, New York, Berghahn Books, pp xix+298

Marina Petronoti

doi: [10.12681/grsr.9358](https://doi.org/10.12681/grsr.9358)

Copyright © 2004, Marina Petronoti



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

### To cite this article:

Petronoti, M. (2004). Renée Hirschon (ed.), 2003, *Crossing the Aegean. An Appraisal of the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey. Studies in Forced Migration, Volume 12*, Oxford, New York, Berghahn Books, pp xix+298. *The Greek Review of Social Research*, 113, 207–212. <https://doi.org/10.12681/grsr.9358>

## BOOK REVIEW

---

by Marina Petronoti

Renée Hirschon (ed.), 2003, *Crossing the Aegean. An Appraisal of the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey. Studies in Forced Migration*, Volume 12, Oxford, New York, Berghahn Books, pp xix+298.

This volume is a long overdue endeavour to tackle the thorny and delicate issue of the compulsory population exchange between Greece and Turkey in 1923. Though this issue has attracted scholarly attention, it has not so far been systematically explored by both sides so as to highlight the opposing as well as similar dimensions of the dislocated people's experience. It is a tribute to Renée Hirschon –who has herself conducted extensive fieldwork among Asia Minor refugees in Greece and is currently Research Associate of the Refugee Studies Centre at the University of Oxford– that she undertakes this task bringing together a combination of perspectives which shed light on the multiplicity of side effects and long-term repercussions of the Lausanne Convention. This attempt was initiated at a dinner party in Istanbul where several academics from Greece and Turkey welcomed the idea of promoting the study of respective “minorities” displacement. The papers presented at a conference Hirschon organised on the 75th anniversary of the Lausanne Convention (1998), have supplemented the material of the present volume.

This eclectic collection aims to avoid bias and inaccuracies by drawing on a range of perspectives. Scholars of different nationality and discipline (sociology, economics, anthropology, history) are cautiously optimistic and firm in their suggestions. They delineate how the Lausanne assessments were implemented by Turks and Greeks, situate their distinct findings in time and space and demarcate the links weaved between historical events and collective attitudes. Presenting history “from both sides”, Hirschon remarks, “can only constitute a work in progress” (p. xvi). A view that bears much of her anthropological insight since investigating Others' ideas, acts and feelings along with the impact these have on the organisation of social life and relations, comprises an essential dimension of ethnographic thinking.

The argumentative force of the volume lies in the careful analysis of the contradictory and ambiguous ramifications of the Convention. These are addressed with a critical eye, as a controversial instrument with which the international community legalised the evacuation of lands Greek and Turkish

populations had lived side by side for centuries. In principle, Allies' basic goal was to guarantee the stability of international order: the arrangements prescribed by the Convention seemed inevitable for the survival of targeted minorities, the cessation of rising tension and the prevention of future upheavals. However, these legal arrangements generated unforeseen responses and complications and failed to safeguard minorities' rights as the disappearance of the Greek community in Turkey attests. In dealing with the discrepancies between territory and nation, both sides of the Aegean expressed aspirations of ethnic purity endorsing the discrimination of people who were expected to accommodate themselves to putative countries of origin.

Compiling sixteen papers and a multi-disciplinary agenda, the volume has some limitations: not all contributions are equally well crafted or provoking, while I was left with the impression that social anthropology could engage more in the exploration of the symbolic repercussions international power relations have at the local level. Nonetheless, all papers add invaluable and complementary information to the debate: Hirschon knows exactly the direction in which she moves and clarifies her own position as one inclined "towards ways of promoting coexistence and symbiosis rather than the enforced separation of diverse peoples" (p. xvi). Testifying diligently the historical coordinates of the exchange, the editor shows that the disintegration of the Ottoman empire and the resultant political and demographic transformations,

had profound consequences and nurtured intense desire for revenge. The Balkan Wars and the First World War added to the instability of the area, while rapid realignments in the international scene entailed the withdrawal of foreign powers' allegiance to Venizelos who nonetheless proceeded with a campaign to Anatolia. The defeat of the Greek army in 1922 invoked large-scale destruction and prompted Greeks' mass exodus from the region.

In addition to the introductory section, the volume is divided in two more parts the first of which includes nine chapters on political, economic and policy aspects of the Lausanne Convention. Barutciski's convincing article attempts a pragmatic and principled approach to the transfer of Greek and Turkish populations. In this, he states that the activities alleviating those who fled remain closely articulated, but should not be confused with the abuse imposed or the punishment of violators. The author's revealing conclusion is that while evacuation and settlement did not provide a remedy, they have to be seen as typical of the era, the only realistic option with which the League of Nations could ensure peace between inflexible states at crises.

Keyder claims that the Convention operated as an "accelerated route" to the foundation of the Turkish identity. Investigating the demise of the Ottoman empire in the relationship between state and society, Keyder argues that, unlike Greece which had consolidated itself as a nation state by the time of the exchange, Turkey had not developed ideals com-

measurable to nationalist doctrines. As he explains, given the failure of the local bourgeoisie to attain independence from the control of the state apparatus and conduce to the establishment of civil societal institutions, earlier versions of state traditions reappeared and popular elements were ignored.

In the *Political Continuations*, Veremis engages more generally with the emergence of ideological party politics. Considering 1922 as “the true divide between the old and the new century in Greece” (p. 62), he resonates that in spite of the tolerance formerly exhibited toward linguistic and religious minorities, after the population transfer Greekness was pursued via a restricted perspective focusing on the uninterrupted continuity of classical antiquity. In this frame, Veremis notes, refugees played a key role in the change of political discourse, induced further fragmentation and were held responsible for the advent of the left-wing in modern Greek society.

Kontogiorgi moves the discussion in a constructive way to the economic effects and implications of the exchange. Devoting her attention to the settlement project in Thrace, she underlines that although Asia Minor refugees advanced the growth of numerous economic sectors, their presence disrupted the fabric of local relations and evoked tension over scarce resources. She then goes on to say that inasmuch as the rehabilitation of these refugees was determined as a means of reinforcing ethnic homogeneity, excessive external borrowing took place increasing the economic burdens of the

state and the interference of foreign powers in domestic affairs.

Concentrating on Turkey, Aktar gives us a quite different picture. As he states, resistance to external aid wedded with the interruption of economic activities and international links formerly maintained by Anatolian Greeks, revitalised the public sector and hindered the power of the Turkish bourgeoisie. Once the new regime was deprived of its imperial traditions, it could do little more than designate a “turkification programme”, that is, legitimate measures forwarding the supremacy of Turkish identity and an undisputable connection between state and society. As Aktar contents, these elements comprise the backbone of ethnic nationalism in Turkey.

Oran considers the experience of Greek and Turkish people who were exempted from compulsory exchange stressing that the meaning of the terminology used was context specific. Pointing out that the Convention created emigrants and national minorities, the author remarks that no mechanisms installed the freedom which was officially allocated to those who did not move. Instead, they were eventually forced to leave for their respective countries as refugees deprived of citizenship. Oran concludes that Greece based its external policy on the irredentist idea, while Turkish nationalism gained strength as a corollary of the “Greek threat”.

In *Religion or Ethnicity?*, Alexandris argues that underlying the decision to expel co-religionists from both countries was the anticipation to safeguard cultural

integrity and avoid claims based on ethnicity. As he explains, though the Greek population in Istanbul, Imbros and Tenedos escaped ensuing exchange, this strict sense of bilateralism did not ensure order. Yet, Alexandris adds, though Greece denied the existence of a Turkish community in national territories, Muslims in Thrace were not treated as harshly as Greeks in Turkey.

Yerolymbos examines the procedure of Greek refugees' settlement with respect to the priorities urban planners had set before the Lausanne arrangements. Prevailing principles and designs were not nonetheless implemented. As the author affirms, due to the urgency of the problem, relevant steps were ill-considered and precluded effective coordination among the agencies involved. In effect, the Greek state was compelled to substitute planning policies with "primitive expedencies" which served only individual interests and brought about damage to the natural environment.

Voutira's article illustrates two different understandings of Greekness, both intimately associated with collective memory. Investigating how images about the "successful adaptation" of Asia Minor refugees to Greece were constructed, Voutira further looks at the consequences such images have on current immigration policies and concrete attitudes toward refugees from the Former Soviet Union. She suggests that since Greeks' rehabilitation in 1923 was seen as a domestic achievement cementing cultural coherence, ethnic-origin refugees who arrive to improve their living conditions (rather

than forcibly), are not accepted as legitimate members of the national family.

The third section of the volume comprises seven chapters on cultural and symbolic aspects of the exchange. Looking at the ways in which Asia Minor Greeks express their identity in space, Colonas asserts that in Turkey they distinguished themselves as agents of modernisation and Western architectural styles. Once they were transferred to Greece however, Greeks could no longer attain distinction by building different houses: as the author tells us, cultural attachment to the villages left behind was sealed through symbolic markers intended to modify the unknown landscape into "home".

Concentrating on the feelings engendered by uprooting, Stelaku also looks at the ways in which Greek refugees give continuity to meaningful ties and reclaim their cultural past. As she records, the construction of churches is one of the major strategies they employ to cope with the disruptive impact enforced transplantation has on identification processes. Stelaku argues that whereas the Orthodox Church formerly served as a vehicle of ethnic differentiation, in the new frame it certifies a sense of belongingness to the newly established community and sustains or reconstitutes family history and traditions.

Moving on the other side of the Aegean, Köker describes the procedure of Rumeli Muslims' dislocation and settlement in Turkey. Noting that their relations with Greeks in Macedonia were peaceful rather than hostile, Köker attri-

butes the alienation they experienced to the abrupt change, lack of familiarity with the new social setting, inadequacy of adjustment conditions and rejection by locals. He observes that forced population transfers should be prevented if they cause emotional stress and turn minorities to refugees without the option of return.

Analysing the case of Cretan Muslims, Koufopoulou exemplifies that religious criteria were not uniformly applied in the exchange and demonstrates how relocation reshaped this group's lives in the realm of language, gender roles and economic practices. She remarks that even though knowledge of both languages helped Cretan Muslims to attain prosperity and despite the distance they preserved from Greek cultural heritage after expulsion, they did not fully integrate in Turkish society as they pronounced Cretan (more than Muslim) identity constituents in their social encounters.

Millas analyses Turkish literature bringing to surface ideas and representations about the forced dislocation. Giving priority to the role of political factors, he argues that the limited attention Turkish novels paid to 1923 events should be accounted for in terms of their evaluation as a victory of the Turkish army as well as because modern Turkey formulates its national identity by ignoring the presence of other ethnic cultures in Anatolia.

Mackridge's paper deals with dominant conceptualisations of the compulsory displacement in Greek

literature. As he ascertains, literary texts depict Anatolian Greeks' bonds with land and soil as indissoluble, thereby invigorating the widespread assumption that Asia Minor coasts have always been and still are, Greek. What makes the difference, Mackridge adds, is that beliefs in the Greekness of this area never entailed actual threat to the territorial unity of the Turkish state.

The last chapter, by Gauntlett, considers how the music and songs Greek refugees brought with them from Turkey were initially censored as degraded indicators of oriental habits, but gradually came to be recognised as vital components of modern national culture. This change, Gauntlett claims, reflects the orientation of the state to Western values in the '20s and the subsequent growth of an occidentalist discourse in Greek politics and cultural production.

The broad canvas of the volume offers a most convincing case that living in the two sides of the Aegean divides as much as unifies Greece and Turkey. By focusing on dual views and perspectives, contributors do more than highlight myths and relations that were fundamental for the two countries. More significantly, the authors enable us to articulate the experience of the exchange with contemporary forms of refugeeness. In particular, they facilitate comprehension of rhetorics on diaspora and their transformation in time and place, the encapsulation of competing claims of the past in the treatment of minorities at present, the role international powers

play in the fabrication of cultural Self, the alternative meanings the notion of exile takes in time and place. Especially in contemporary Greece, a society hosting individuals from all over the world, the narratives propagated to remove Anatolian Greeks into an “unmixed” context present analogies with the discriminative policies and the delineation of religion and ethnicity as prerequisites for membership in the national community. The Muslim/Christian, Turk/Greek divisions have not vanished; they remain politically relevant, yet their significations do not correspond neatly to older ones while the

content and expression of nationalist sentiment are reshaped.

Research on forced migration is certainly worthwhile pursuing further. Future accounts should clarify that unless political determinants of exile are cured, emotional trauma, fear and unwillingness to come to terms, will endure. It would moreover be useful to find out whether the expansion of humanitarian responses and moral principles –of little importance in the 1920s– pacifies conflict and leaves room for amicable relations between opposing cultures in the era of transnationalism and globalisation.