

An Anatolian Village in Greece

by Gülen Göktürk, 2010

Until recently, exchange of populations in all over the world was upheld by local or international authorities as viable method to solve inter-ethnic conflicts. Even today some statesmen glorify exchange of populations for the sake of creating homogeneous nations. Therefore, this seemingly old-fashioned way of homogenizing a nation still occupies some sort of place in current nationalist perspectives. However, this attitude ignores the human aspect of the situation and unfortunately, very few scholars have considered the suffering and losses of people during the migration process in their studies. At this very point, it is quite important to tell the story of a group of people whose ancestors suffered being deported from their homeland. Basicly, the objective of the story below is to indicate the vividness of Anatolian culture in Greece decades after the Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey and the emphasis is on the human aspect of the forced migration without any “great nationalistic purpose.”

Eighty six years after their arrival at their new home, I met a number of Karamanlidhes in North-West Greece, in a city called Ioannina. The Karamanlidhes were the Turkophone Orthodox Christians of interior Anatolia, namely, Cappadocia province of the Byzantine Empire or Karaman province of the Ottoman Empire. Currently this area consists of five cities: Nigde, Kayseri, Kirsehir, Nevsehir and Konya. It is important to note that there were also communities of Karamanlidhes living in Mediterranean provinces, Istanbul and in big coastal cities of the Ottoman Empire and in cities like Odessa.

The Karamanlidhes were deported to Greece as a result of the protocol concerning the Exchange of Populations between Turkey and Greece, which was attached to Lausanne Peace Treaty (1924). According to the protocol, the Turkish nationals of Greek Orthodox religion and the Greek nationals of Muslim religion had to change their places. The Greeks of Istanbul and the northern Aegean islands of Gokceada (Imbros) and Bozcada (Tenedos); and the Muslims of Western Thrace were exempted from the protocol. As a result, approximately 400.000 Muslims and 1.200.000 Greek Orthodox people were deported from their hometowns. Many people had already left their home before the Lausanne Conference; after the Treaty was signed only a few people were still remaining and the Karamanlidhes were one those groups. If we also consider the migration flow of Muslims during and after the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) from Greece, we can claim that the total number of refugees fleeing from both countries was much higher than calculated.

The Karamanlidhes started to leave Anatolia in 1924 and found themselves shelter in various towns of Northern Greece. The position of Karamanlidhes was seen problematic from the eyes of people whose minds were shaped by 19th century nationalistic ideas. They were alienated by the Grecophone Greeks just because they spoke Turkish and since they have Greek Orthodox faith, they were also disregarded by the Turks. Interestingly enough in the 19th century, Greek nationalistic minds started to question who is part of ‘Greek Nation’ and united in the idea that the Karamanlidhes are ‘unredeemed Greeks’ waiting to be emancipated by the Greek Kingdom. And they started their emancipation project by appointing Greek teachers to the area and founding new schools.ⁱ By this way Turkish speaking pupils started to receive relatively secular education in Greek vernacular and yet started their ‘Hellenization’ which was supposed to end up in their total emancipation from the Ottoman ‘yoke’.

For the Turkish side a concern about the Karamanlidhes and discussions about their origins started much later. In the first two decades of the 20th century, some intellectuals argued that the Karamanlidhes were of Turkish origin. They claimed that they moved to Anatolia before the continuous Turkish raids and changed their religion but not their language under the Byzantine rule. The most interesting attempt concerning the Karamanlidhes appeared during the Turkish-Greek War (1919-1922). A priest from Keskin –a place located near Ankara- called Efthymios Karahissaridis (Papa Eftim) started to visit various towns in interior Anatolia and tried to mobilize the Christians against the Phanar Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Istanbul and against the Greek irredentism. He published a declaration claiming that the Christians of Anatolia were suffering not less than the Muslims in this war and he also emphasized the ‘Turkishness’ of the Turkish speaking Christians. However, it is known that his movement was not very popular among the Karamanlidhes.

Against the debates concerning their origins, the Karamanlidhes defined themselves as such in a book called *Kaisareia Metropolitleri* (i.e. the Metropolitan Bishops of Kayseri) which was published in 1896:

*Although we are Rums (i.e. Greek Orthodox), we don't know Rumca (i.e. Greek) and we speak Turkish. We don't write and we don't read Turkish (i.e. in Arabic lettering), and we don't speak Greek either. We are a mixture. Our alphabet is Greek, we speak Turkish.*ⁱⁱ

To be regarded as a Turk, Islam was the first and foremost requirement, therefore, the Karamanlis never saw themselves as Turks. Until the Hellenization attempts towards the end of 19th century, they did not see themselves as Greeks either. Since religion was the main

identifier of one's identity in the lands of Ottoman Empire, they were simply the Greek Orthodox Christians (i.e. *Rums*)ⁱⁱⁱ.

During the negotiations in Lausanne concerning the exchange of populations, Turkish side's endeavour was to deport all the non-Muslims except the Karamanlidhes. They were considered as unharmed for the well-being of the 'Turkish Nation' because during the war they did not associate themselves with neither side and they were speaking pure Anatolian dialect of Turkish. The Turkish Orthodox Patriarchate had already been found under the leadership of Papa Eftim and the idea was to replace the Phanar Greek Orthodox Patriarchate with the Turkish one which promoted Turkish cause during the war. However the negotiations concerning the faith of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate was not left to the hands of Turkish delegation and under the pressure of Greek side and Western States, the Phanar Patriarchate was decided to remain in its place without any political and administrative function but to provide divine services for the local community, which was being the Greeks of Istanbul. In the end, the Turkish authorities decided that the Karamanli Christians could no longer be tolerable if they remain the flock of politically powerful Greek Orthodox Patriarchate. For the Greek side, if Christians of interior Anatolia were taken under the influence of Papa Eftim and Turkish Orthodox Patriarchate, this may curb the power of the Greek Patriarchate and even overthrow it. Therefore, it seemed like a better strategy to bring the Karamanlidhes to Greece. As a consequence of trade off politics the Karamanlidhes were expelled eventually as the last group of people who were subject to mass deportation.^{iv}

Coming back to the main story, during my stay in Greece last summer, I visited a village founded by the Karamanli refugees coming from Kayseri in Ioannina. The name of the village is Neokaisaria meaning New Kayseri. The people of the village are originally from a village called Karacaören which is located in subprovince of Kayseri, called Develi. I met some elderly people and they greeted me with their perfect Anatolian dialect of Turkish. The second generation refugees who are now in their sixties and seventies speak Turkish because they learned it from their parents who were the Turkophones. So Turkish is their mother tongue. What really surprised me during my stay in the village was to hear a Turkish mourning in a funeral I happened to attend. An old villager called Nikos was singing old traditional Turkish songs near the coffin. Later I became friends with him and he sang us some other songs with other villagers' company. During my stay I did chat with some other villagers and I sometimes heard touching words from them. For example, an old villager called Maria told me with her perfect Turkish that she speaks Turkish from her heart; however, she does not feel the same when she speaks Greek. All of the people I met visited their home town in

Turkey at least for once. The village in Anatolia is their nostalgic *patrie*. They try to keep the memories and traditions alive but they don't have any intention to go back or to buy estate. One of them called Yordanis told me that when he visited his village in Turkey, a villager offered him to buy a piece of land in the village. But he added that he has no such aim because his home is Neokaisaria. In the middle of the village, there is a memorial stone erected by the first generation refugees. The words written on the stone seem like a warning for the next generations not to forget the tragedy that the Exchange of Populations created: "Memory in alert/ Here and there/It never forgets/...of Neokaisaria." It is apparent that the villagers remember their *patrie* in Anatolia with longing; they still sing the traditional songs and dance the traditional Anatolian dances; and they have connections with the Association of Cappodocians in Greece and organize events to keep alive memories of the tragedy their ancestors suffered. However, it seems that Turkish is dying among the youngsters. Probably in few decades the vernacular will be extinct.

Lastly, historians, most of whom are sincerely bounded to the official historiography of their states both in Turkey and Greece, distorted the consequences of the events of 1920s with their relatively nationalistic evaluations. For Turkey, the impacts of the Population Exchange have always been a footnote in the "great national saga of creating a new state". For the Greek side, the situation was completely different. The "unmixing of peoples" provided the Greek historians and the politicians another opportunity to declare the world how they suffered throughout the history. Therefore, they have chosen to remember every single detail of the 'Population Exchange.' However, most of the time the emphasis was on the economic and political consequences of the event and personal stories of the refugees were exploited for the sake of great national causes or for "re-inventing" nationalism. Against this background, the author of this article tell her experiences with the Karamanlidhes just to indicate how contemporary the repercussions of the forced migration which took place eighty six years ago, and does not aim at questioning the "Greekness" of the Karamanlidhes living now in Greece.

ⁱ Augustinos, Gerasimos. *The Greeks of Asia Minor: confession, community, and ethnicity in the nineteenth century*. Ohio: The Kent University Press, 1992.

ⁱⁱ Balta, Evangelia. "The adventure of identity in the triptych: vatan, religion and language." *Türk Kültürü İncelemeleri Dergisi* 8 (2003): 25-44.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Yıldırım, Onur . *Diplomacy and displacement: reconsidering the Turco-Greek exchange of Populations*. New York: Routledge, 2006.