

Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

Greek and Turkish Nationalism in Formation:
Western Anatolia 1919-1922

Resat Kasaba

RSC No. 2002/17
Mediterranean Programme Series

EUI WORKING PAPERS



EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE

All rights reserved.
No part of this paper may be reproduced in any form
without permission of the authors.

© 2002 Resat Kasaba
Printed in Italy in March 2002
European University Institute
Badia Fiesolana
I – 50016 San Domenico (FI)
Italy

Mediterranean Programme

The Mediterranean Programme was established at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies of the European University Institute in Autumn 1998. The Mediterranean Programme has two long-term strategic objectives. First, to provide education and conduct research which combines in-depth knowledge of the Middle East and North Africa, of Europe, and of the relationship between the Middle East and North Africa and Europe. Second, to promote awareness of the fact that the developments of the Mediterranean area and Europe are inseparable. The Mediterranean Programme will provide post-doctoral and doctoral education and conduct high-level innovative scientific research.

The Mediterranean Programme has received generous financial support for Socio-Political Studies from three major institutions who have guaranteed their support for four years: ENI S.p.A, Ente Cassa di Risparmio di Firenze, and Mediocredito Centrale. The European Investment Bank, Compagnia di San Paolo and Monte dei Paschi di Siena have offered generous financial support for four years for studies in Political Economy which will be launched in Spring 2000. In addition, a number of grants and fellowships for nationals of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries have been made available by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (for doctoral students) and the City of Florence (Giorgio La Pira Fellowship for post-doctoral fellows).

For further information:

Mediterranean Programme
Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies
European University Institute
via dei Roccettini, 9
50016 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI)
Italy
Fax: + 39 055 4685 770
<http://www.iue.it/RSC/MED>

INTRODUCTION*

The violent separation of the Greeks and Muslims of Asia Minor from each other in these years represents one of the most important turning points in the region's history, second, perhaps, only to the capture of Constantinople by Turks four and a half centuries earlier. Yet, despite the very large number of people involved and the huge disruptions it caused in the region, we seldom think about the radical shift that must have taken place in the mentalities of the people as they planned, instigated and participated in this momentous shuffle that involved more than 1.5 million Greeks and Turks. We forget that the communities that were separated in 1923 had been living together for centuries and that even those boarding ships in Izmir and elsewhere would not have dreamed that their departure would be permanent. Rather than exploring these topics, what passes as analysis of these events is usually limited to justifying the tragedy from the Turkish side or lamenting it from the Greek or Armenian perspective.

To the Turks, 9 September 1922 was liberation day for Izmir, the crowning event in their successful war of deliverance from the occupying Greek and Allied Forces. School children in Turkey learn nothing of the forced migration of millions of people; instead they read the celebratory accounts of how "the enemy" was "dumped into the sea"¹. Official versions of history insist that there was no deliberate persecution of Greeks and Armenians under Ottoman rule and that the difficulties these communities faced during the war were unavoidable because of the chaotic circumstances of those years.

What is seen as a triumph for the Turkish nationalists was, of course, a catastrophe for the Greeks. In 1922 the Greeks were forced to abandon one of the oldest centers of Hellenic civilization in Asia Minor and leave a city and a region that had become a site of great commercial prosperity. The waves of refugees from Anatolia presented a heavy burden on the small state of Greece and the problems associated with settling these families remained unresolved for most of the 1920s. In the Grecophile accounts of these disasters, part of the blame goes to the misguided policies of the Greek government and part of it to the wavering policies of the Great Powers. There is no doubt, however, who was responsible for the material, physical, spiritual losses and pain the Greeks and Armenians of western Anatolia suffered: "The destruction of Smyrna

* This paper was presented at the Second Mediterranean Social and Political Research Meeting, Florence, March 21-25, 2001, Mediterranean Programme, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute.

happened, however, in 1922, and no act ever perpetrated by the Turkish race in all its bloodstained history, has been characterized by more brutal and lustful features, nor more productive of worst forms of human sufferings inflicted on the defenseless and unarmed,”² wrote George Horton, the American Consul general to Izmir and a man known for his deep Greek sympathies.

The two sides have such diametrically opposed perceptions of those fateful years that even the accounts of well known events for which there is ample eyewitness testimony do not agree with each other. For example, in describing the fire that left Izmir in ruins, the Greek and Armenian survivors report having seen “Turks taking bombs, gunpowder, kerosene and everything necessary to start fires, in wagon-fulls...through the streets” in the Armenian district.³ Pro-Turkish accounts, on the other hand, either ignore the whole episode or claim that the Greeks had severed “all the rubber pipes of the fire brigade”⁴ or that “[a]ctual culpability has never been proved”,⁵ or that “there was in fact not one fire, but many,” some of them set by Christians, some by Turks,⁶ or that “any description of uniformed Turkish soldiers lighting fires in the city... may be assumed to be part of the fire-fightings rather than incendiary attempts”.⁷

1. BEFORE THE FIRE: THE MYTH OF THE *MILLETS*

Whatever the sympathies of the authors, most explanations of ethnic conflict in the Near East start with the *millet* system; that is, with the notion that Ottoman society had consisted of neatly demarcated communities (so called *millets*) each with a distinct language, culture, and religion, and living and working in separate neighborhoods and villages. Even though the histories that are sympathetic to the Greek or the Turkish perspectives use the notion of the millet as representing a prototype for a primordial understanding of nations, they differ in their perceptions of the relationship between the Ottoman state and these communities.⁸ The Turkish versions project a benevolent image of the Ottoman administration as a system of rule that gave its subject people considerable autonomy to practice their religion and maintain their cultural habits and characteristics.⁹ In this perspective, through the institution of millets, the Ottoman state becomes responsible for protecting and preserving non-Muslim religions and cultures in their domains. For Balkan historians, on the other hand, millets were the depositories not only of the essential characteristics of each community but also of the tremendous resentment these communities felt for their suffering under the “Turkish/Muslim yoke” that oppressed them for centuries.¹⁰ While they stand at opposite ends of an interpretive spectrum, both of these versions seem to suggest that centuries of cross-community relations

had not affected the essential characteristics of these millets in any significant way.

What gets lost in these competing explanations and claims is the fact that Ottoman society resembled a kaleidoscope of numerous, overlapping and cross-cutting relations and categories more than it did a neatly arranged pattern of distinct elements.¹¹ In addition to the *Karamanlis*, there were, in Anatolia, Armenian-speaking Greeks who used Greek characters to write Armenian; in Istanbul Greek speaking Jews who used the Hebrew alphabet to write Greek; and Greeks who spoke Ladino.¹² Turkish novelist Halit Ziya attended a Catholic school that was established by the Spanish priests where he was assigned a geography book written in Turkish with Armenian characters.¹³ The idea that these communities could be easily identified, separated from each other, moved, and relocated across long distances contradicted both the actual conditions and the worldviews and expectations of the people who became the subjects of these policies. Both in 1914 when they were relocated by the Young Turks, and in 1923, when they were exchanged, most of the Greeks expected their departure to be temporary.¹⁴

To be sure, whether somebody was Muslim or not was a very important criterion in the stratification of Ottoman society and, when all is said and done, non-Muslims were considered to be the second-class citizens of the state. But religion was only one of the markers Ottomans used to categorize their subjects. They also referred ethnicity, tribal ties, Sufi affiliations, occupation, and nomadism when identifying their subjects. These categories changed, overlapped, or cut across each other and the Ottomans did not consistently favor any one of them over the rest. Their approach was much more flexible. For example, in earlier centuries, nomadism was central to the achievements of the state, and hence, nomadic tribes were at the center of the empire's initial organization. But after the sixteenth century, as the establishment of a bureaucratic administration became the central concern of the state, nomadic tribes found themselves at the receiving end of some very harsh treatment, especially if they resisted settlement.¹⁵ Underlying this administrative flux, was a social fluidity which allowed people to convert, settle down, join or quit Sufi orders, move in and out of cities (with the exception of Istanbul) and combine nomadic and sedentary forms of agriculture. To make matters more complicated, some of the converts, such as the *dönmes* (from Judaism) and "crypto-Christians," were never completely accepted by the Muslim community as genuine believers.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the changing conditions in the eastern Mediterranean made the straightforward application of ethnic and national categories there even more difficult. Starting in the 1830s, the region's trade grew several times over, and Izmir became firmly established as a major Mediterranean port placed at the center of a vast commercial network that

extended outwards to other sites in Europe and inwards toward the sites of cultivation and production in its hinterland. These conditions of economic expansion entailed the even closer interaction of people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds.

On all levels and in all occupational groups, western Anatolian society was diverse and became even more so in the course of the nineteenth century. There were Greek and Turkish peasants, non-Muslim and Muslim merchants; Muslims who worked for foreign banks and for the Public Debt Administration;¹⁶ Greek bandits who kidnapped Muslim notables; Muslim notables who supported Muslim bandits; Muslim bandits who kidnapped Muslim notables; and Muslim bandits who sought the mediation of Levantine residents when they got into trouble with the state.¹⁷

The municipal council of Izmir created in 1868, provides a good example of the degree to which the various ethnic and religious communities had become intertwined in the nineteenth century. The council had twenty-four members broken down as follows: six Muslims, five Greeks, three Armenians, one Jew, and nine foreigners. Even the executive council which was to oversee the day-to-day affairs of the city, had two Muslim and two non-Muslim Ottoman members and four foreigners.¹⁸ Associations such as the *Hilal-i Ahmer Cemiyeti* (Red Crescent Society), Sporting Club, and the Association of Turkish and Greek Journalists maintained an ethnically mixed membership through the period of the Greek occupation.¹⁹ Even some of the bands of brigands were multiethnic in composition. One such band when it was captured in 1919 had 21 members 9 of them Greeks (Ottoman, four from Greece), six Turks, and two Armenians.²⁰

Izmir's fire brigade was underwritten by the London Insurance Company and included both non-Muslim and Muslim firefighters. During the great fire, some from this brigade confronted the Turkish troops and accused them of torching the buildings while the firefighters were trying to put out the flames. To this, a soldier responded, "You have your orders and I have mine"²¹ According to one contemporary account, on September 10, "the Turkish Military Governor, learning that there were still twelve Greeks in the fire department, ordered their immediate expulsion and arrest".²²

Professor Konstantinos Karatheodoris from Göttingen University constitutes another example of the enduring complexities of loyalties and their incompatibility with rigid boxes. He was hired by the Greek government to establish the "Hellen University of Smyrna" in 1919. Karatheodoris's father, Kara Todor Pasa, had been a high ranking employee of the Ottoman Foreign

Ministry and played a prominent role in the delegation that represented the Ottoman Empire at the Berlin Conference in 1878.²³

We can multiply the examples of the fluidity of the social, economic, and ethnic categories in the Ottoman Empire, but this still leaves unanswered the question of why these conditions could not be maintained, and why the conflict in Asia Minor deteriorated so quickly into an ethnic conflict, with Greeks and Armenians on one side and Muslim Turks on the other. The scale of killing, destruction, and the numbers who were made homeless and exiled are too large and the eyewitness accounts are too detailed and numerous to ignore as the biased observations of one group or the other. A French officer described the scene in Izmir on 13 September as follows: “The Armenian quarter is a charnel house... In three days this rich quarter is entirely ravaged. The streets are heaped with mattresses, broken furniture, glass, torn paintings...One sees cadavers in front of the houses. They are swollen and some have exposed entrails. The smell is unbearable and swarms of flies cover them...”²⁴ On the other side, Halide Edib, who accompanied the Turkish troops in western Anatolia, recounts how the “Turkish army reached one city after another, only to find it a heap of ashes; its population scattered, women half mad with grief, digging at the stone heaps with their nails...Hell seemed to be on an earth in which two peoples struggled, one for deliverance, another for destruction. There was no quarter given on either side”.²⁵

2. CAUSES OF THE COLLAPSE

What made the people of western Anatolia rape, mutilate and kill their neighbors with such impunity? Can there ever be a sufficient explanation for the wanton destruction of lives and property that took place in this region during the first two decades of the twentieth century? Part of the answer to this question has to come from within the region where the killings and deportations took place. In many instances people harassed, beat, forced out, and even shot their neighbors precisely because they knew them. In doing so, they were acting, not on behalf of some grandiose plan or under the impetus of a deep hatred toward a specific ethnic or religious group, but to redress an insult or a slight committed by a specific individual or family. Such acts of revenge played a big part in the rapid deterioration of the relations between these communities, first under the Greek occupation and then after the reestablishment of Turkish rule. But this can only be a part of the explanation since we can also point to many instances of Turkish villagers looking after the property of their Greek neighbors when the latter were driven away to the islands in 1914, or Greek peasants protecting their Turkish neighbors from the excesses of the regular and irregular forces of the Greek army.²⁶

In any case, if all that took place were petty acts of revenge, the destruction in western Anatolia would never have reached the level it did after World War I. For the civic and economic networks in the region to fall apart with the speed that they did, there had to have been a much more forceful and sustained attack, and such an attack could come only from sources that were not integral to these networks. To put it another way, the cosmopolitan and prosperous networks that sustained Izmir were destroyed, not as a result of the natural evolution and eventual clash of separate and inherently antagonistic communities, but through the decisive intervention of three sets of forces whose origins lay elsewhere.²⁷ The first two of these consisted of the competing ideologies of Greek and Turkish nationalisms and the third, the substantial number of fighters who were either external or at best marginal to the civic networks of western Anatolia.

3. TWO NATIONALISMS IN CONFLICT

Mutually exclusive and antagonistic as they were, the nationalist ideologies of the Greeks and Turks were similar in one important respect: they were both products of post-Enlightenment Europe and were shaped by the same internally conflicting trends of thought concerning the history and the desired orientation of their respective communities. In the case of Greek nationalism, there was, on the one hand, the Hellenistic thesis that emphasized the importance of reconnecting the Greeks with their history that was the source of classical Western civilization.²⁸ Many distinguished Greek and Grecophile scholars became ardent followers of this line of thinking, contributing to the creation of neo-Hellenic enlightenment that was influential not only among the Greeks but also in Western Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. This line of thinking was very critical of the Orthodox Church. Adamantios Koraes, who is considered to be a leading thinker of this school, wrote: "If the Graeco-Roman Emperors had given to the education of the race a small part of that attention which they gave to the multiplication of churches and monasteries, they would not have betrayed the race to the rulers more benighted than themselves".²⁹

No Greek nationalist could afford to turn his back on the east completely, however. It was there that the Byzantine history was centered, the seat of the Orthodox Church was located, and most importantly, an overwhelming majority of ethnic Greeks continued to live until the first decades of the twentieth century. The "Romeoic" thesis, which put more emphasis on this Eastern heritage saw the history of the Greeks as deeply intertwined with the history of the Eastern Church and regarded some aspects of Hellenistic enlightenment with suspicion because of its pagan undertones.³⁰ Both the Romeoic and

Hellenic prescriptions for the future of the Greek nation had the same goal of creating a unified state that would include all, or most of the ethnic Greeks of the region. But their understanding of who the Greeks were and what the character of the Greek state should be varied widely. These conflicting lines of thinking pulled the Greek nationalism in opposite directions with equal force, ultimately causing it to become immobile and inflexible.³¹

Most ethnic Greeks, especially those in the diaspora had at best an ambivalent attitude toward both strands of Greek nationalism. By using family networks, ethnic ties, and other historical links that dated back many centuries and extended far into Europe, the Greeks of the Ottoman Empire had played a key role in bringing about the commercial boom of the nineteenth century in the eastern Mediterranean. What put them in such an advantageous position in these networks were their multifarious links with other groups, their mobility, and the expansive nature of their activities. From their perspective, confining or focusing these activities within the boundaries of a small state was neither practical nor desirable, especially if it had to happen at the expense of other centers such as Izmir or Alexandria.

Even though the initial excitement of independence had attracted some migration to the Kingdom of Greece, this did not last long and most of these families returned to their homes after being disappointed in their prospects in the new country.³² For example, “the town of Ayvalik, which was devastated and depopulated in 1821 had by 1896 re-acquired an almost exclusively Greek population of thirty-five thousand”³³ In Izmir, the Greek population increased from thirty thousand to seventy-five thousand between the 1830s and 1860s”.³⁴ The wealth of Asia Minor continued to attract a steady stream of Greek nationals to the region throughout the rest of the nineteenth century. The partisans of the new state were unhappy with the cosmopolitanism of the Greek communities of Anatolia; they appeared to be so removed from their heritage that some of them did not even speak Greek. The nationalists saw the wealthy families of Izmir and Istanbul as helping not the Greek cause but their own interests and the interests of the Ottoman state. To correct this situation, some of them organized campaigns to “Hellenize” these lost communities. These efforts were not greeted with any enthusiasm by the locals, and for the most part they failed.³⁵

These feelings of resentment and suspicion played a large role in pushing Greece into the two Balkan wars in 1912 and 1913 and then into the occupation of western Anatolia in 1919. While some in Greece believed that only by uniting the wealthiest and the most successful parts of the Greek diaspora with the new homeland could Greek nationalism succeed, others did not trust the

highly cosmopolitan and liberal nature of the networks abroad, and they sought to harness these to serve the interests of the new state.

As soon as the Greek army landed in western Anatolia the whole region fell into chaos and became the site of an extremely destructive conflict that lasted for three-years. There were close to 400,000 refugees from the Balkans who had been settled in western and southern Anatolia between 1912 and 1919.³⁶ These people were naturally apprehensive about the prospects of living under the Greek rule from the beginning and resisted it as much as they could. Their uncertainty was matched by the status of Anatolian Greeks who had been expelled to the islands and to Greece by the Young Turk governments before and during the Balkan wars. By the end of 1920, 126,000 of these were returned and settled in western Anatolia by the Greek administration.³⁷ According to some estimates, at least 150,000 Muslims were left homeless as a result of the resettlement of the Greek refugees.³⁸ In addition to these massive movements that shuffled and reshuffled the region's population several times over, the Greek invasion also forced the much more difficult and painful process of untangling the intricate local relations that had connected various ethnic and religious groups together. Greek youth who had been recruited into the Ottoman army during World War I, primarily to work in labor battalions, were "liberated" only to be drafted into the Greek army to fight their erstwhile friends and neighbors. As the Greek army spread into the interior, the occupying forces removed the Ottoman administrators from the upper echelons of the civil administration and put Greeks in charge of the area. However, because these officials were brought from Greece, most of them did not speak any Turkish, which made it impossible for them to establish even the semblance of authority in the first months of the occupation.³⁹ In 1922, when the Greek army was roundly defeated and forced to flee, they burned most of the villages and cities in the interior, which in turn created the pretext for revenge among the Turkish troops and Muslim residents in Izmir.⁴⁰ In retrospect, it would not be an exaggeration to claim that the only accomplishment of this profoundly misguided policy was to galvanize the sentiments of exclusion within Turkish nationalism and plant the very seeds of enmity that are often mentioned as the cause of this conflict.

In ways that were no different from its Greek counterpart, Turkish nationalism also contained some deep ambiguities at its core affecting not only how the Turks thought of themselves and their history but also the policies they implemented in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The first, and the most critical among these, had to do with the ethnic definition of Turks as a community and a nation. Through the writings and activities of intellectuals from Azerbaijan, Crimea, and the Volga region of Russia such as Ismail Bey Gasprinski, Agaoglu Ahmet and Akçuraoglu Yusuf, Ottomans became aware of

a community of ethnic Turks who were spread across a large territory extending from the Mediterranean basin into Central Asia. This conception of Central Asia as the font of Turkish civilization was reinforced by the influence of some of the Sufi orders who had moved westward from central Asia over many centuries.⁴¹ Another important tie to the east was established more circuitously, by way of Europe, where exiled Ottoman intellectuals read the works of early Orientalists who were interested in Central Asian cultures, Turkic tribes, and languages.⁴² The translations of the works of these European scholars would be used in the debates about the history and nature of Turkish identity especially in the early decades of the twentieth century. There was, however, the obvious but awkward reality that this wide and broad community of Turks who were supposed to constitute a community had no real experience that linked them with each other. The Muslim Turks in places like Izmir clearly had much more in common with their Greek or Armenian neighbors than they did with their cousins in the Caucasus, along the Volga, and in Central Asia. Nevertheless, the idea of a distinct Turkish race found its way into new Turkish nationalist thought and was melded into a historical narrative that took some liberties with facts but served the requirements of the time very well.⁴³

Like its Greek counterpart, Turkish nationalism also had a somewhat uncertain and wavering relationship with religion. In the course of the Greek-Turkish war, Mustafa Kemal deliberately appealed to Muslims in Anatolia. He particularly benefited from the help of the Sufi *tarikats* during the war and accepted and used until his death the honorific title, “Ghazi” (Holy Warrior) which was given to him by the Nationalist Assembly. However, in the years that followed the end of the war, Mustafa Kemal became increasingly firm in his belief that the difficulties the Ottoman Empire suffered in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were caused by its failure to take part in the scientific and industrial development of the West. And for this he placed the blame squarely on Islam. In the 1920s, he turned vehemently against all religion, orchestrated an all-out effort to eradicate the impact of Islam and Islamic institutions in the new state and made sure that secularism was enshrined as a founding principle of the republic. The radicalism of this new orientation ushered in a thorough soul-searching and a persistent debate about the place of religion in modern Turkey, and this discussion continues to occupy a central place in the politics of Turkey today.

Countering the pull of Asia and Islam on Turkish nationalism was the attraction of the West whose ideals and institutions had become lodestars for the nationalist leaders. In the minds of Atatürk and his colleagues, there was no doubt that Western civilization provided the only acceptable model of progress, and the positive sciences the only means of getting there. Ironically, this new

orientation implied that in order to move forward, the new nation would have to turn its back not only on religion but also on its newly discovered history in Central Asia. For a while, in order to justify such a complete turn away from the east, some writers put forth and defended, at considerable cost to historical and archeological accuracy, the idea that Anatolia had always been the cradle not only of Turkish but all civilizations.⁴⁴

Over the years, the nationalist leaders on both sides have compensated for the ambiguities that had marred the foundations of their respective ideologies by assuming a particularly rigid and intolerant stand on all issues that involved their history and their relationship to each other. It was feared that any compromise would expose the weakness that lies at the core of both Greek and Turkish nationalism and prevent the two nations from fulfilling their “historical destinies”. It is not a long road from this uncompromising rigidity to the justification of violence and destruction that was carried out in the name of these ideologies in and around Izmir.

4. INTRUDERS

No analysis of the western Anatolian catastrophe would be complete without referring to the outsiders who carried out most of the killings and brought about the physical destruction of this region. On the Greek side, the troops who occupied, attempted to govern, and, in their retreat, destroyed many of the towns in the interior came for the most part from Greece.⁴⁵ The bands of local Greeks who joined the Greek army were on the margins of the social and economic networks in Anatolia and were attracted by the messianic-nationalist rhetoric of the Greek army.⁴⁶

Until a properly disciplined Turkish army was put together in 1921, armed irregulars (*efes*, *çetes*, *zeybeks*) served as the backbone of the resistance against the Greeks in western Anatolia.⁴⁷ Even after the centrally organized army seized control, the operations, these bands continued to operate as an auxiliary force, and they played a key role in retaking Izmir. For both sides, then, victory was contingent on the performance of large numbers of groups who had no interest in the civic and economic networks in the region. Here I will touch on only those who helped the Turkish side, since they ended up playing the decisive role in how the history of Izmir and western Anatolia unfolded in these crucial years.

The origins of the armed irregulars who joined the nationalist forces were diverse. There were draft dodgers, tax evaders, and petty criminals among them. But a great many of them originated from among the tribal communities who

had been moved from the eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire as part of the state's recurrent campaigns of settling nomadic groups. The first of these campaigns was organized at the end of the seventeenth century and they became increasingly more comprehensive as the imperial administration acquired the features of a modern state in the following centuries. But moving these groups and even granting them land did not always ensure that they would abandon their old ways and settle. Most of them continued their pastoral and nomadic lives in their new environment combining them with some farming that they usually incorporated into their annual cycles of migration.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, as the Ottoman state pressed them for more taxes and for military service, these tribes became even more rebellious. In addition to various forms of passive resistance which they had always utilized, they started to organize and support armed units to rob merchants, kidnap wealthy individuals for ransom, and collect protection fees from caravans.⁴⁸ The Ottoman army organized a number of campaigns in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to punish these *çetes* and restore the authority of the central administration in the countryside. But the advantage in these encounters lay with the brigands who were organized in smaller units, dispersed in the terrain, and had created a network of support for themselves. On those rare occasions when the Ottoman army captured a famous bandit, he was punished in the most emphatic way so that others would desist from following or helping such individuals and their followers.⁴⁹ As an alternative measure, the government relocated Kurds and Circassians in an attempt to use them in suppressing these groups in western Anatolia. But it soon became apparent that these new arrivals were no more willing to go along with the directives of the state than the previous tribes who had been settled there.

After the Balkan Wars, as the Ottoman Empire drifted into World War I, the government abandoned all pretense of seeking to impose order in the hinterland of Izmir. The anarchy that ensued enticed even more people to take to the mountains in order to pursue a life of banditry. In addition to the Muslim outsiders such as the Circassians, Tatars, and Kurds, there were also a large number of Greek bandits partaking in the fruits of the general lawlessness in Anatolia. During these early years, none of the bandit groups paid much attention to questions of national or religious affiliation in choosing either their friends or their prey.

As they drew the Greek army across western Anatolia, Mustafa Kemal's forces made extensive use of these bandit groups who had been roaming the countryside. This was, perhaps, inevitable. The Ottoman army had been fighting on many fronts continuously since 1911; it had suffered a series of defeats and

had officially been demobilized by the armistice in 1919. By the time the nationalist effort was getting organized, there was but a skeleton left of this once formidable fighting force. When the Greek army entered Aydin in 1919, all that remained to defend that city were 10 officers, 43 soldiers, 46 pack animals, and 2 cannon batteries.⁵⁰ The resources of the irregular troops, on the other hand, were formidable. Most of them had stayed out of the war and had used the years of turmoil and conflict to enrich and arm themselves and their followers. By force, intimidation, and offering protection, they had built for themselves a network of support among the villagers and nomadic tribes. The nationalist leaders were aware of the risks involved in relying too heavily on these groups.⁵¹ In addition to being poorly trained and lacking discipline, they had resisted all efforts at being incorporated into the regular army that was rebuilt after 1920. The fears of the nationalist lawmakers proved to be justified in that several of the bandits rebelled openly against the nationalists, and one even went over to the Greek side with his three thousand men, four cannons, and four hundred machine guns.⁵² In many cases, however, in return for their support, the nationalists gave the bandit leaders a free hand in expanding their activities, raiding the cities, robbing the urban population, and especially in confiscating the properties of the fleeing Christians.

Needless to say, their service during the war improved the image of the *çetes* significantly in Turkey. For example, Mustafa Kemal invited 400 followers of one of the more notorious bandits, Demirci Mehmet Efe, to Ankara during the war and gave him the rank of colonel in the Turkish army.⁵³ In the years that followed the final victory of the nationalist forces, *çetes* would be celebrated as romantic heroes and the veteran *zeybeks* would become permanent fixtures in parades and ceremonies marking national holidays.

5. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE STATE

There is no doubt that without the presence of these outsiders, neither Izmir nor its interior would have been destroyed, at least not to the extent that they were. Yet, the fact remains that no matter how weak they might have been, neither the nationalist government nor its army was very effective or interested in preventing the persecution of Greeks and Armenians or protecting these communities at a moment when such protection was sorely needed. After all, Mustafa Kemal himself was in Izmir while the city was burning and he even had to move from his headquarters on the waterfront to the home of his future wife in Göztepe when the fire came too close. On the journey that had to pass through the entire city, it was feared that “the waves of panic-stricken people would overwhelm the Ghazi and smother him”.⁵⁴

Why, then, did the late-Ottoman and the early nationalist regime lose interest in the terrible fate of the Greeks and Armenians? Was there a preconceived plan of mass murder directed at Armenians and Greeks? Was what happened in western Anatolia a part of this master plan, or, alternatively, did the Ottoman and Turkish officials seize on these events that were beyond their control and used them to realize their ultimate goal of ridding Anatolia of Armenians and Greeks? If so, why? Was a racist ideology or sentiment behind the commitment of these crimes or the failure to prevent them? These key questions lie at the heart of the Ottoman Empire's fateful years. It is unlikely that a reasonable conversation will take place among historians or that anything resembling a consensus will emerge unless these questions are addressed in a way that is perceived as fair by all parties to this discussion. The following points, however, may provide a reasonable place to start such a conversation, especially in relation to the Greeks and Armenians of Izmir.

It is quite clear that starting from the final decades of the nineteenth century, the Ottoman, the Young Turk, and the nationalist administrations became increasingly suspicious of the position and the aspirations of the Greek and Armenian residents of the empire. The persecution of Muslims in the Balkans after the Ottoman Russian War of 1877-78, shifting policies of the great powers, and the uncertainties inherent in Turkish nationalism are some of the factors that brought about this general mistrust. By the early decades of the twentieth century, the Greeks and Armenians had become the "others" of Turkish nationalism. The rhetoric the nationalist representatives used in some of their deliberations in the Ankara Assembly leaves no doubt as to how these communities had come to be perceived by them.⁵⁵ In addition to this ideology, which now advocated the creation of a homogeneous nation, the Young Turks and their nationalist descendants also possessed a fledgling communication network and a new secret police organization, the *Teskilat-i Mahsusa*, both of which they used very effectively in remaking Anatolian society.⁵⁶ Needless to say, little room was left in this environment for those who believed that some reconciliation might still be possible.⁵⁷

Identifying the culprits and specifying the circumstances of the destruction of Izmir will undoubtedly take much more research and conversation among researchers. In the meantime, it serves no historical purpose to impute collective guilt or ascribe indiscriminate victimhood for an entire people forever. When history is presented from a perspective that seeks to justify either one of these points of view, it produces a distorted picture that cannot do justice to the actual record of events.

University of Washington
kasaba@u.washington.edu

ENDNOTES

¹ For a preliminary comparison of school books in Turkey and Greece, see Herkül Milas, "İlkokul Kitapları," *Türk Yunan İlişkilerine Bir Önsöz: Tencere Dibin Kara* (Istanbul, 1989), pp.34-48; See also the essays in Türk Tarih Vakfı ed. *Tarih Eğitimi ve Tarihte Öteki Sorunu*, (Istanbul, 1998).

² George Horton, *The Blight of Asia* (Indianapolis, 1926), p. 112

³ Housepian, *The Smyrna Affair*, p.141.

⁴ Halide Edib, *The Turkish Ordeal* (New York, 1928), p. 386.

⁵ Stanford Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, Volume II (Cambridge, 1977), p. 363.

⁶ Justin McCarthy, *Death and Exile: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821-192*, (Princeton, 1995), p. 291-92.

⁷ Heath Lowry, "Turkish History: On Whose Sources Will It Be Based? A case Study on the Burning of Izmir," *Osmanlı Arastirmalari*, 9 (1988): 13.

⁸ Pandey argues that in Indian historiography the notion of "community" is reified in a similar way and used misleadingly as a precursor of the "nation". See Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi, 1992), pp. 1-22.

⁹ See for example, Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, Introduction, idem, eds., *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society: The Central Lands*, (New York, 1982), p.1.

¹⁰ See for example, L. S. Stavrianos, *The Balkans since 1453* (New York, 1961), pp. 96-115.

¹¹ See Halil Inalcik, "The Meaning of Legacy: The Ottoman Case," *Imperial Legacy: The Ottoman Imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East*, ed. Carl Brown (New York, 1996), p. 24.

¹² Clogg, "Anadolu Hristiyan Karindaslarımız," 67-68

¹³ Halit Ziya (Istanbul, 1987), p. 119.

¹⁴ Dido Sotiriyu, *Benden Selam Söyle Anadolu'y*, (Istanbul, 1989), p. 205.

¹⁵ See Cengiz Orhonlu, *Osmanlı İmparatorlugunda Asiretlerin İskani* (Istanbul, 1987); Xavier de Planhol, "Geography, Politics, and Nomadism in Anatolia," *International Social Science Journal* 11, 4 (1959): 525-31.

¹⁶ For example, for a while the only Muslim employees of the Izmir branch of the Ottoman Bank were the distinguished novelist Usakligil and Atatürk's future father-in-law Muammer Bey. (Usakligil, *Kirk Yil* pp. 320-23) Among the employees of the Izmir branch of the PDA was Abdulhalim Bey who served briefly as acting governor when the Turkish army took the city in 1922. (Umar, *Izmir'de Yunanlilarin Son Günleri*, p. 280).

¹⁷ For extensive descriptions of banditry and relations between bandits, local notables, and the state see Sabri Yetkin, *Ege'de Eskiya* (Istanbul, 1996) and Ersal Yavi, *Efeler*, (Aydın, 1991).

¹⁸ Gerasimos Augustinos, *The Greeks of Asia Minor* (Kent, 1992), p. 93

- ¹⁹ Berber, *Sancili Yillar*, pp. 133, 163, 191. For example, Adnan Menderes, who would later become the Prime Minister of Turkey, played in a mixed football team in the fall of 1919. Umar, *Izmir'de Yunanlilarin Son Günleri*, p. 238.
- ²⁰ Berber, *Sancili Yillar*, p. 91.
- ²¹ Housepian, *The Smyrna Affair*, pp. 142-143.
- ²² Cited in Lowry, "Turkish History..."p. 14.
- ²³ Berber, *Sancili Yillar*, p. 441; Toynbee, *The Western Question*, p. 166.
- ²⁴ Housepian, *Smyrna Affair*, p. 136.
- ²⁵ Halide Edib, *Turkish Ordeal*, p. 367.
- ²⁶ Toynbee, *Western Question*, pp. 294, 389.
- ²⁷ In recent years a number of studies have approached communalism and communal violence in North India from a similar perspective, which highlights the role of "external forces and agencies". Ian Copland, "The Further Shores of Partition: Ethnic Cleansing in Rajasthan 1947," *Past and Present*, 160, (August 1998): pp. 203-239. See also Sandria Freitag, *Collective Action and Community*, (Berkeley, 1989), especially part III; Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism*.
- ²⁸ Michael Herzfeld, *Ours Once More* (New York, 1986) pp.18-21.
- ²⁹ Quoted from Toynbee, *Western Question*, p. 337.
- ³⁰ Herzfeld, *Ours Once More*, p. 20; Richard Clogg, "*I kath'imas Anatoli*: the Greek East in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *Anatolica: Studies in the Greek East in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Aldershot, 1996), p. 5.
- ³¹ Clogg, "*I kath'imas...*" p. 1.
- ³² The establishment of independent Greece did not affect the movement of people between the islands and the Anatolian mainland. See Tuncer Baykara, "XIX. Yüzyilda Urla Yarimadasinda Nüfus Hareketleri," *Social and Economic History of Turkey*, ed. Osman Okyar and Halil Inalcik (Ankara, 1980), pp. 279-286. Even during the Balkan wars, one of Dido Sotiriyu's brothers returned from Greece complaining that "land in Greece is very hard to work; it is full of stones and swamps". His plan was to work in Izmir or sell his land there and use the money to start a small business in Greece (Sotiriyu, *Benden Selam Söyle*, p. 50).
- ³³ Clogg, "The Greek Millet..." p. 195
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ Clogg, "Anadolu Hristiyan Karindaslarimiz," pp. 80-81.
- ³⁶ McCarthy, *Death and Exile*, p. 161.
- ³⁷ Berber, *Sancili Yillar*, p. 322.
- ³⁸ Ibid. p. 247
- ³⁹ Ibid. pp. 299-317.
- ⁴⁰ The extent of destruction that was carried out in the Balkans and western Anatolia between the Balkan wars and the end of the Greek occupation is well documented. It is obvious that each of the sides in these conflicts carry a part of the blame in that they all contributed to this

carnage. For documentation, see Carnegie Endowment, *The Other Balkan Wars* (Washington, D.C., 1993); Toynbee, *The Western Question*; McCarthy, *Death and Exile*; Housepian, *The Smyrna Affair*. Unfortunately, most of the writing about this period seeks to vindicate one side or the other. It is of course, futile to try to draw up balance sheets and compare the sufferings of different groups. Overall, if we look at the period between World War I and the exchange, the Greeks and Armenians appear as the bigger losers in the conflict. In much larger numbers than the Muslim Turks, they ended up being ejected from the only place they had known as home for generations. But if we broaden our time frame and include the emigration of more than one million Muslims from the Balkan states after 1878, the latter group also suffered deeply in these tumultuous years. (see Karpat, *Ottoman Population*, p. 75; Nedim Ipek, *Rumeli'den Anadolu'ya Türk Göçleri*, (Ankara, 1994), p. 41).

⁴¹ See Raymond Lifchez, ed., *Dervish Lodge*, (Berkeley, 1992); Richard Tapper, ed., *Islam in Modern Turkey* (New York, 1991); Ahmet Yasar Ocak, *Türk Sufiligine Bakislar* (Istanbul, 1996); Fuad Köprülü, *Islam in Anatolia after the Turkish Invasion* (Salt Lake City, 1993).

⁴² Kushner, *The Rise of Turkish Nationalism*, p. 10.

⁴³ Various arguments supporting this thesis were articulated and presented at a congress that was convened in Ankara in 1932 (see *Birinci Türk Tarihi Kongresi*, Istanbul, 1932).

⁴⁴ Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, (New York, 1961), pp. 3-7.

⁴⁵ Toynbee, *Western Question*, pp. 166-7.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 282. Toynbee writes that eventually many local Christians formerly engaged in peaceful occupations joined these bandits.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Armed resistance by the tribes against the centralizing drive of the state go back to the seventeenth century. See Çagatay Uluçay, *18 ve 19. Yüzyillarda Saruhan'da Eskiyaçlık ve Halk Herketler*, (Istanbul, 1955), pp. 80-81.

⁴⁹ Yetkin, *Ege'de Eskiyaçlar*, p. 172-73.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁵¹ *TBMM Gizli Celse Zabıtları, I*, (Ankara, 1980), pp. 264-265. The Greek state had a similar relationship with the brigands that roamed the countryside in Thrace, Macedonia and Thessaly. It was only in 1912 that the Greek army became professional, regular fighting force. Until then, the Greek state relied on brigands to protect its interests and take advantage of the incursions these fiercely independent elements organized into the Ottoman territories. See John Koliopoulos, *Brigands with a Cause* (Oxford, 1987).

⁵² Halide Edib, *The Turkish Ordeal*, p. 231.

⁵³ Yavi, *Efeler*, pp. 124-125. Greeks never abandoned their brigands either, even after the establishment of the central army. Right before the Balkan Wars, Eleutherios Venizelos is reported to have said that “whereas the regular army fought for the state, the irregulars, as true descendants of the pre-Independence armatoles, fought for the freedom of the unredeemed Greeks”. (Koliopoulos, *Brigands with a Cause*, p. 296)

⁵⁴ Falih Rifki Atay, *Çankaya* (Istanbul, 1969), p. 324

⁵⁵ *TBMM, Gizli Celse Zabıtları*, p. 322.

⁵⁶ The 1927 census shows how effective and efficient this campaign was. According to its findings only 11 to 38 Greek-speaking individuals were left in places like Ödemiş, Seferihisar, Tire, all old centers of Greek life (*Umumi Nüfus Tahriri*, p. 23).

⁵⁷ Zeki Arıkan, “Tanzimat ve Mesrutiyet Dönemlerinde İzmir Basını,” *Tanzimat’tan Cumhuriyet’e Türkiye Ansiklopedisi*, Vol. I, p. 109.