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The late Ottoman Empire as laboratory of demographic engineering

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Back in 2003 a group of Turkish Ph.D. students organized a workshop in Leiden on the topic of “Ethnic conflict in empire and republic”, meaning, of course, the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey. The proceedings of this very interesting workshop were published in Istanbul two years later, but because the Turkish colleagues were afraid that it might damage their career prospects in Turkish academe, they published it under my name and asked me to write an introduction. Inspired by the work of the great (and then recently deceased) Myron Weiner¹ I wrote an introduction called “Demographic engineering and the birth of modern Turkey.” In it I argued that it was no exaggeration to call the period between 1850 and 1950 Europe’s age of demographic engineering. Throughout this period large groups of people, whole communities, were uprooted from their ancestral lands, deported, evicted and relocated. If we exclude the establishment of the Jewish pale of settlement in Russia in 1791, this process started with the expulsion of the Crimean Tatars by the Russian imperial government and ended with the eviction of Germans from Poland and Czechoslovakia after World War II a century later. It cost countless people their lives. In addition, genocidal policies have led to wholesale slaughter of particular ethno-religious groups from the Russian pogroms in the Eighteen Seventies and Eighties to the Ottoman massacre of the Armenians in World War I and the holocaust in World War II. The process was then frozen by the Cold War, only to reach its final stage in the wars that attended the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the Nineteen Nineties.

What brings together these cruelties under the heading of “demographic engineering” is the fact that underlying them was a notion of creating homogenous populations within the boundaries

¹ Myron Weiner and Michel S. Teitelbaum, *Political Demography, Demographic Engineering*, Oxford: Berghahn, 2001.

of a state claimed exclusively by the titular majority community.² I argued that the Ottoman lands have played a central role in this gruesome aspect of the history of Europe. In fact: we could argue that in the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century the Ottoman Empire was the laboratory of demographic engineering in Europe.

Until the final quarter of the Eighteenth Century all of Southeastern Europe was still under direct rule from Istanbul, while the Northern shores of the Black Sea were controlled by the Ottoman vassal state of the Giray Khans, based in the Crimea. The wars of 1768, 1792 and 1828 brought this area under Russian control. Repressive measures towards the Muslim population as well as settlement of Russian and Ukrainian peasants (and Cossacks) in the newly conquered territories led to a first exodus of Muslims to the Ottoman Empire. This process was reinforced by the Crimean war of 1853-54, which was lost by the Russians but left the Crimea in Russian hands. Large numbers of Kipchak Turks (“Tatars”) were pressured into emigrating to Anatolia, where they were resettled primarily in the area between Eskişehir and Ankara in Western Asia Minor.

The Russian conquest of, first the coastal plains and then the mountainous heartland of the Caucasus in the 1860s led to a huge exodus of tribal peoples from the area: Abkhaz, Circassians,³ Chechens and others. The exodus, which was stimulated by the Russian authorities, sometimes with terror tactics, totally overwhelmed the Ottoman authorities and resulted in huge casualties through hunger and disease.⁴ In trying to cope with the situation the Ottoman government now resorted to a form of demographic engineering itself. The Ottoman state was an empire and had no aspirations for ethnic homogeneity as yet, but it used the need for resettlement of hundreds of thousands of displaced persons to achieve two aims: improving the economy and improving security. Settlement close to the Russian border was unacceptable to Russia, so the Circassians were settled in a North-South band across the centre of Anatolia, on marginal land at the edge of the Syrian desert (in modern Syria and Jordan, where the ruins of Amman became a Circassian town) but also in the Dobrudja (on the probable route of any Russian armies marching south), in Thessaly (close to the then Greek border) and on the southern shores of the Sea of Marmara, covering any threat from the south. For the mountaineers from the Caucasus settlement in the

² Erik Jan Zürcher, Giriş: demografi mühendisliği ve modern Türkiye'nin doğuşu, in: Erik Jan Zürcher (ed.), *İmparatorluktan cumhuriyete Türkiye'de etnik çatışma*, İstanbul: İletişim, 2005, 9-17.

³ Circassian (Çerkes) is a term that in Turkey is used specifically for the Adige tribal people and much more widely for inhabitants of the Northern Caucasus. See for instance the introduction of: Arsen Avagyan, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ve Kemalist Türkiye'nin devlet-iktidar sisteminde Çerkesler*, İstanbul: Belge, 2004. This is originally a 2002 Ph.D. dissertation defended at Moscow State University.

⁴ Justin McCarthy, *Death and exile. The ethnic cleansing of Ottoman Muslims 1821-1922*, Princeton: Darwin, 1995, 32-39.

marshy lowlands that were often infested with malaria did not come easy and mortality was very high.⁵

The Muslim refugees from the Caucasus, who had had to seek refuge because of their faith into the empire and therefore felt a special loyalty to the sultan-caliph, provided Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876-1909) with many of his most trusted officers.⁶ They strongly identified with the Islamic empire and this was to prove significant as their arrival in the empire also more or less coincided with the emergence of separatist nationalism among the Christian communities of the empire.

Nationalism as a political creed with the attendant claims on the composition of the population in certain areas on which the national state was projected, started among the Greeks and the Serbs in the first quarter of the Nineteenth Century. The success of the Greek and Serbian nationalists in establishing independent states (although they fell far short of the borders of the imagined nation) encouraged others, primarily the Bulgarians and the Armenians. The collision between the two types of community – Muslim refugees and Christian nationalists, took on a dramatic character when unrest in the province of Bosnia-Herzegovina spilled over into the Bulgarian provinces in 1876. The ensuing revolt of Bulgarian peasants was fanned by nationalist intellectuals who were hoping to establish an independent Bulgarian kingdom. The Ottoman government suppressed the insurrection with the aid of Circassian militias, who were all too eager to defend their new homeland. The brutality of these “bashibozuks” was then imprinted on the European consciousness through William Gladstone’s influential 1876 pamphlet *Bulgarian Horrors and the Questions of the East*, which turned liberal and Christian European public opinion against the Ottomans and left them quite isolated when war broke out with Russia again in 1877.

The 1877-1878 war, which ended with the collapse of the Ottoman armies and the Russian army camped fifteen kilometers outside the capital Istanbul, was a disaster of unprecedented proportions. The “War of ‘93” as it was called in Turkey after its year in the Muslim calendar, was a traumatic experience, which deeply influenced the generation that lived through it as well as their children, in particular those born in the late seventies and early eighties, who would later become known as the “Young Turks.” The trauma was not just that under the Treaty of Berlin (which revised the even more disastrous peace treaty of San Stefano that the Ottomans had been forced to conclude with the Russians) the empire lost large territories in Eastern Anatolia, Bosnia, the Principalities and Bulgaria, but also that some of the areas that were now lost (Eastern and Southern Bulgaria, Bosnia, Kars and Ardahan) had had Muslim majorities or at least pluralities

⁵ See: Ryan Gingeras, *Imperial Killing Fields: Revolution, Ethnicity and Islam in Western Anatolia, 1913-1938* (Ph.D. University of Toronto, 2007).

⁶ Arsen Avagyan, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ve Kemalist Türkiye'nin devlet-iktidar sisteminde Çerkesler*, Istanbul: Belge, 2004, 96 ff.

that now fled or were forced to flee from their ancestral lands. It is difficult to know how many people became permanent refugees or died as a result of the war and the ensuing establishment of Bulgaria, enlargement of Serbia and Austrian occupation of Bosnia, but a number of 800.000 has been mentioned.⁷

The 1878 settlement (and the subsequent loss of Thessaly to Greece in 1881) also put paid to the efforts of the liberals within the governing Ottoman elite to create the notion of a multi-ethnic Ottoman citizenship, based on the ideal of “Unity of the (Ethnic) Elements” (İttihadi Anasır), or Ottoman patriotism. This idea, developed by a group of Ottoman bureaucrats and intellectuals as an alternative to separatist nationalisms in the eighteen sixties,⁸ seemed to have triumphed with the introduction of constitutional-parliamentarian government in December 1876, but it was now totally discredited. This enabled the sultan to prorogue parliament indefinitely in 1878. In the decades that followed, tensions between Muslims and Non-Muslims continued to rise and the process in which religious affiliation developed into a national identity marker continued. The process now also spread from the Balkans to Anatolia, because Armenian nationalists started to use the provisions calling for reforms under European supervision in the “Armenian” provinces of the empire in article 61 of the 1878 Berlin treaty in their efforts to internationalize the Armenian question and get foreign support for Armenian autonomy. Armenian nationalist agitation increased and the Ottoman government of Sultan Abdülhamit II, using the Russian Cossacks as example, relied on Sunni Kurdish tribal militias, the so-called *Hamidiye* regiments, to suppress nationalist agitation in the east. This led to increased tension and by the mid-eighteen nineties to severe anti-Armenian pogroms, which left tens of thousands, possibly over a hundred thousand, dead.

In this same period (the eighteen nineties) the movement of the “Young Turks” came into being within the ranks of students and young bureaucrats and spread to the Ottoman army after 1906. Its official demands were for rational and modern, parliamentary and constitutional government on the basis of the “Unity of the Elements”, the old liberal programme of the Eighteen Sixties but on closer inspection it is clear that it was also a movement of patriotic young Muslim officers and bureaucrats whose aim was to “save” the empire both from the separatist tendencies within the Non-Muslim communities and the encroachments of the European powers, who had used the capitulatory regime (the set of tax exemptions and privileges granting extraterritoriality to foreign residents and their protégés) to relegate the Ottoman Empire to a semi-colonial status. The fact

⁷ Ibid, 90-91.

⁸ Şerif Mardin, *The genesis of Young Ottoman thought. A study in the modernization of Turkish political ideas*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1962.

that the Young Turk “Committee of Union and Progress” was completely dominated by people from Macedonia is relevant here, because that is where separatist nationalism had been most in evidence. The area called Macedonia in European diplomatic parlance consisted of the Ottoman provinces of Skopje, Salonika and Monastir. The ethnically and religiously mixed nature of its population made it a bitterly contested area with overlapping claims from Greek, Serbian and Bulgarian/Macedonian nationalists, and by the early twentieth century also an Albanian national movement. The struggle was not just about territory, it was about the identity of the population itself and had been since the eighteenth century, when Bulgarian nationalists for the first time formulated the demand for an independent Bulgarian Orthodox church, independent of the Greek orthodox patriarchate in Constantinople. In an environment where religious affiliation had been the most important identity marker, this demand of course constituted a fundamental challenge, not just to the ecumenical claims of the patriarchate, but also to those of the Greek nationalists. In 1870 the Ottoman state had basically sided with the Bulgarians, when it instituted the “exarchate” or independent Bulgarian Orthodox church. This forced every Orthodox community in the European provinces of the empire to define itself as either Greek or Bulgarian. After the Ottoman defeat of 1878 and the emergence of a de-facto independent Bulgaria, Greek and Bulgarian nationalists in Macedonia were actively supported by adjacent national states. In the northernmost areas, Serb claims were upheld by agitators supported by Belgrade. All three nationalities engaged in guerrilla warfare, as much against each other as against the Ottoman authorities. Within the Macedo-Bulgarian nationalist movement deep divisions emerged, with those favouring a greater Bulgaria being opposed by Macedonian separatists. It was the latter group that organized the spectacular “Ilinden” rebellion of August 1903 and founded the short-lived republic of Krushevo. This rebellion, although suppressed with relative ease (and great brutality) by the Ottomans, indirectly led to the Mürzsteg agreement of 1904 and the establishment of European control over the gendarmerie in the Macedonian provinces.

It was this environment that shaped the outlook of the Young Turks. Not only did two thirds of them hail from Macedonia, they also cut their teeth as military officers in the struggle against Greek, Bulgarian, Serb and Albanian bands in this area. The establishment of a tutelary regime through the arrival of foreign gendarmerie officers happened before their very eyes. The extent to which this shaped their thinking showed itself very soon after the Young Turk revolution of July 1908. Although officially the main demand of the revolutionaries was the restoration of the constitution of 1876, which was the embodiment of the ideal of multi-ethnic Ottoman citizenship, it soon transpired that their actual policies were inspired by the ideal of the unitary state and by

Ottoman Muslim (if not quite yet Turkish) nationalism. Their experience in Macedonia had left them with very little faith in multi-ethnic, Ottomanist solutions.

So the parliamentary regime established by the Young Turks in 1908 witnessed an increase rather than a decrease in the inter-ethnic tensions within the empire. The extent of these showed itself in October 1912 when four allied Christian states attacked the Ottoman Empire and within weeks chased the Ottoman army out of the European provinces. In the peace settlement of 1913 eighty percent of the European territory of the Empire was lost, with 4.2 million inhabitants (about 16 percent of the total population of the Empire). The areas lost had been Ottoman for over five hundred years. They included the most developed and richest provinces. The loyalties of the Greek minority, which dominated much of Ottoman trade and industry seemed at best doubtful during the war, the Bulgarians were decidedly hostile and while Armenian soldiers seem to have fought loyally in the Ottoman Army, the Greek and Bulgarian soldiers defected en masse in the first days of the war. This “betrayal” of the Christians gave rise to outbursts of feelings of outrage, resentment and calls for revenge, which fill the pages of the Turkish-language press in 1912-1914. Changing the demography of what remained of the empire, or at least its most sensitive areas, now entered the political agenda. The ideal of forced national homogeneity was already taking shape in the minds of the Young Turks when World war I broke out. At the same time, their regime had to find an answer to the problem of resettling a mass of refugees much as their predecessors in the Eighteen Sixties and seventies had had to do.

The Balkan War again caused many people to leave their homes. Around 800.000 people fled in different directions. In part, these were people simply fleeing the battle zones, but about half of them, some 400.000, were Muslims, who, out of fear for Greek, Serbian or Bulgarian atrocities, followed the retreating Ottoman army. Large numbers of these refugees died from cholera (which had been brought over with the troops arriving from Syria), but those who remained, gravitated towards Constantinople and had to be resettled there or transferred to Asia Minor. In the Constantinople area the refugees built the first of what later came to be known as ‘gecekondu’s, settlements built without permission on state land. They were also housed in barracks and mosque complexes.

Ironically, the new borders left Thrace west of the Maritza river, which had a large Muslim majority, in Greek hands and Eastern Thrace, which was two thirds Greek and Bulgarian, in Ottoman hands. During the war about fifty thousand Bulgarians from Eastern Thrace had fled to Bulgaria and a roughly equal number of Turks had gone in the opposite direction. It was in order to improve the position of the border areas that Bulgaria and Turkey attached a protocol on population exchange to the peace agreement they concluded in Constantinople on 29 September

1913. Under the protocol, a mixed commission was to be formed, which was to act as impartial arbiter and assess and liquidate the property left behind by the emigrants. Although the agreement was never actually carried out because of the outbreak of World War I less than a year later, it served as a model for later agreements on population exchange in the Balkans and the Near East. It should be pointed out, however, that the population exchange envisaged in 1913 was strictly on a voluntary basis.

The loss of the Balkan provinces had a tremendous impact on the political and administrative elite of the Empire, not only because of the history or economic importance of the provinces. As mentioned before, a disproportionate part of the Young Turk elite hailed from the Balkan provinces. Politicians like interior minister and party leader Talât Pasha, administrators like Evranoszade Rahmi, the governor of Smyrna (İzmir), or officers like Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) all hailed from the Balkans themselves and had lost their own homeland. In most cases their families were among the refugees. From 1913 onwards they focused strongly on Asia Minor, or Anatolia, as the Turkish heartland. Although to most of them it was essentially a foreign country, they adopted it consciously as their new homeland, which was to replace the lost provinces.⁹

The first effects of this new Anatolian policy could be seen in the early months of 1914. The secretary of the ruling Committee of Union and Progress in Smyrna/Izmir, Mahmut Celâl (who was later to become Turkey's third president) was instructed by the minister of the interior, Talât Pasha, to Turkify the Western seaboard of Asia Minor. With the help of militias of the so-called 'Special Organisation' (Teşkilati Mahsusa), a secret organisation of volunteers ready to do the C.U.P's dirty work¹⁰, he succeeded in forcing up to 150.000 Greek Orthodox to flee the coastal provinces and move to the Greek islands of the Aegean directly opposite the mainland. The means employed consisted mainly of veiled threats and intimidation. Militias would come at night and start drumming in the main square. At the same time the local Ottoman authorities would announce that they could not guarantee the inhabitants' safety from the next day onwards. For most, this was enough encouragement to leave.¹¹ Those most affected were the Greek businessmen and commercial farmers, as the drive behind the campaign was economic as much as it was political: the Ottoman government now fully embraced the 'National Economy'

⁹ Erik Jan Zürcher, How Europeans adopted Anatolia and discovered Turkey, *European Review* 13/3 (2005), 379-394.

¹⁰ Although there is a great deal of popular literature about the organization, the only scholarly study so far is Philip Stoddard's 1963 Ph.D. thesis (Princeton): *The Ottoman government and the Arabs, 1911-1918: a preliminary study of the Teşkilati Mahsusa*. This study does not cover the organization's activities in the Caucasus and Iran, nor does it deal with its central role in the persecution of the Armenians. It is clear that refugees, and in particular Circassians, dominated the rank and file of the organization.

¹¹ Celal Bayar, *Ben de Yazdim, Vol 5*, Istanbul, 1967, 1572-82.

programme that aimed to replace the non-Muslim bourgeoisie, which dominated the modern industrial, financial and commercial sectors of the economy, with a 'national', that is to say: Muslim, bourgeoisie of their own.¹²

In May 1914, the Ottoman government sought to give permanence to the new situation by concluding an agreement on population exchange with the Greek government. Greek prime minister Venizelos accepted the plan in principle, on condition that it would be voluntary. A mixed commission on the pattern of the Turco-Bulgarian agreement of 1913, was to be established to oversee the just disposal of properties, but nothing ever came of this.

When the Great War broke out, the Young Turk leadership opted to take part as a belligerent on the side of one of the major European powers, because they feared that neutrality would result in the empire being carved up by the victors. The fact that Germany was the sole European power ready to conclude an alliance with the Ottomans made it possible for the pro-German faction in Istanbul, led by Enver, to join the central powers. The decision to go to war was taken on 25 October and on 11 November war was officially declared. Enver and his circle still were convinced that Germany would win the war quickly, even though the crucial Battle of the Marne had already been lost in September and a war of attrition had begun. A German victory on the Eastern Front in their eyes would offer a unique opportunity to redeem some of the losses that had been incurred in the five Russian-Ottoman wars of the past 140 years.

In December 1914 an expeditionary force crossed the Sinai desert and attacked the Suez Canal in an operation that was a logistical marvel, but could only be strategically meaningless. At the same time a far larger force attacked the Russian army at Sarıkamış. Decimated by the extreme cold on the mountain passes they were being sent to cross, the Ottoman army was defeated and had to withdraw. A typhus epidemic did the rest so that less than a quarter of the ninety thousand Ottoman troops survived the winter. From then on, the Ottomans were on the defensive.

It was clear that a Russian offensive into Anatolia was to be expected when spring came and the Ottoman command felt increasingly uneasy about the loyalty of the Armenian (and other Christian) communities in such an event. So, already in February Armenian soldiers in the Ottoman army were disarmed and those of them who were not in labour battalions already were put into those battalions and under armed guard. There were widespread pogroms against Christian villages. In March piecemeal deportations of Armenians in the rear of the front took place and in April an insurrection broke out in the Armenian quarters of the Eastern border town

¹² For an overview of the new "national" firms, see Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye'de "Millî İktisat (1908-1918)*, Ankara: Yurt, 1982, 363-4.. It should be pointed out that Toprak essentially tells half the story. Focusing on the creation of new Muslim businesses but leaving out the destruction of Greek and Armenian business.

of Van at a time when the British and French started their amphibious campaign to force the Dardanelles. The rebels aimed to join forces with the advancing Russian army and in fact managed to hold out until the Russians arrived. This was the situation in which the Young Turk government decided on the wholesale deportation of the Armenian population of Anatolia to Syria and Northern Mesopotamia. At approximately the same time, it also ordered the deportation of large parts of the Greek Orthodox population in the coastal areas to the inland. Mass deportations were not new. In fact: they were a traditional Ottoman policy, used to create loyal majorities in sensitive areas, to repopulate regions or to punish tribes. One could say that demographic engineering in this sense had been a feature of Ottoman rule for centuries. The scale of the deportations of 1915 was unprecedented, however, as well as the cruelty with which they were executed. The area to which the Armenians were directed, the province of Zor, was totally devoid of means of subsistence and no preparations were made to receive the hundreds of thousands that were on the march. The aim seems to have been to reduce the Armenian presence to about five percent of the population in any given locality, but the deportations were used by a radical faction within the ruling Committee of Union and Progress to physically eliminate the Armenian population. Partly through the incredible hardships suffered during marches of hundreds of miles to the south and partly through mass slaughter, primarily of adult Armenian males, some 7-800.000 Armenians lost their lives.¹³

The idea of the perpetrators was to create a Muslim majority all over Anatolia to prevent what had happened in the Balkans and the Caucasus from happening again in this land. A very important recent study by Fuat Dündar, “The Code of Modern Turkey” (a Paris Ph.D. thesis that has so far only been published in Turkish)¹⁴ carries as its subtitle “The ethnic engineering of the Union and Progress (1913-1918)”. In his study, Dündar analyses the secret (coded) telegraphic correspondence of the Directorate for the Settlement of Tribes and Refugees and of the Department of General Security of the Ottoman home office in order to demonstrate that the Young Turk government had very clear ideas on what it considered to be the ideal demographic make-up of Anatolia. The deportations of Greek Orthodox from the coastal areas in Western Anatolia to the hinterland and that of the Armenians to the Syrian desert were programmed to

¹³ Among the issues most hotly contested in the context of the Armenian genocide is the number of fatalities. Estimates vary between 200.000 (the lowest number put out by Turkish government propagandists to 1.5 million (the maximum number claimed by Armenian historians. Justin McCarthy gives a transparent account how he arrives at 600.000, but the number mentioned by the Ottoman government itself after the war, 800.000, was later confirmed by the Turkish general staff. Taner Akçam, *A shameful act. The Armenian genocide and the question of Turkish responsibility*, New York: Metropolitan, 2006, 183.

¹⁴ Fuat Dündar, *Modern Türkiye' nin Şifresi. İttihat ve Terakki' nin Etnisite Mühendisliği (1913-1918)*, İstanbul: İletişim, 2008.

meet exact targets: no more than five percent non-Muslims anywhere in Anatolia and a maximum of 10 percent Armenians in the designated concentration areas along the Euphrates. There were consistent efforts to gather exact statistical information on the composition of the population and demographic change was recorded meticulously throughout the process of the Armenian deportations. This is an important conclusion. Responsible scholarship now seems to be converging towards two interpretations of the Armenian genocide (which are not mutually exclusive): a. that it should be seen as part of a chain reaction triggered by earlier instances of ethnic cleansing the Balkans and the Caucasus and b. that in the way it unfolded in 1915-16 it was essentially an event-driven process of escalation rather than the execution of a blueprint. Dündar's conclusions would seem to indicate that, while both may still be true, an ideal of forced national homogeneity was certainly an element in the equation. In other words: that it was definitely a process of demographic engineering.

When we look at the life histories of persons who played leading roles in the horrible story of the Armenian genocide, we can clearly see that this genocide should indeed be understood as a link, perhaps the link, in a chain going back to the expulsion of Muslims from the Caucasus and the Balkans. Many of the main architects of the genocide, people like Dr Bahaettin Şakir, who directed the policies from Erzurum in 1915 Şükrü Bey (Kaya, later also minister of the interior in the republic), the head of the Directorate for Resettlement, Abdülhalik Bey (Renda, the governor of Bitlis and later Aleppo in 1915) and Mehmet Reşit (governor of Diyarbakir) stand out. On lower levels, in the ranks of the "Special Organisation" (*Teşkilati Mahsusa*) that played an important role in the massacres, immigrants, especially Circassians, made up the main component. Even if we have no contemporary evidence from 1915 to show that revenge was the primary motive for these people, the overrepresentation of refugees among the killers is striking.

Relocating refugees from the Balkan War was definitely an important element in the events of 1915. Under the leadership of the Directorate for Settlement of Refugees and Tribes in the Interior Ministry, refugees were given "abandoned" Armenian real estate as soon as the original inhabitants had left. As in earlier cases described above, this operation served twin aims: resettlement of refugee families and increasing the empire's hold on a given area.

The chain of cause and effect extends beyond World War I. The resistance organized by general Mustafa Kemal Pasha against the partition of Anatolia among the victors of World War I

and their Greek and Armenian clients, was from the very start defined as a struggle against Greek and Armenian claims and in practice this is exactly what it turned out to be. The first armed clashes in the struggle were between Turkish nationalist militias and Armenian gendarme forces armed by the French. By 1920, the French and their Armenian troops were forced to withdraw from Cilicia¹⁵ (with cities like Urfa, Antep and Maraş) and a total boycott by the Muslim population made life impossible for those Armenians who had returned after the war.¹⁶ In the winter of 1920-21 a successful campaign by the army on the Eastern front led to the defeat of the Armenian republic, which had to renounce all territorial claims on Anatolia. In 1921-22 the Greek army of occupation was first halted on the Sakarya river and then defeated and driven out of Anatolia.

When the Greek army collapsed and its remnants retreated towards the sea, the large majority of the Greek population, fearing Turkish reprisals, also fled. The number involved is not entirely clear, but an estimate of between 400.000 and half a million seems justified. These people as a rule left in great haste with only the things they could carry. They were transferred to Greece by a host of larger and smaller vessels of all descriptions and flags. In the following months, mass emigration continued. When the Turkish nationalists demanded the surrender of Eastern Thrace, the Greeks living there, some 250.000, as well as some 50.000 Armenians, left for Greece, but as British forces still occupied the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, the Turks had no means of transferring troops there. As a result the refugees from Eastern Thrace could prepare their migration much more carefully and take much more of their belongings with them. After the Turkish victory, two groups of Greek Orthodox were left in Asia: the communities in central Anatolia, which were partly Turkish-speaking (the so-called 'Karamanlis') and those living on the Eastern Black Sea coast, the Pontian Greeks. Each of these groups numbered about 200.000 souls. In addition there were several hundred thousand Greek Orthodox in the Constantinople area, partly residents of long standing, partly refugees.

The idea of exchanging the Greeks of Asia Minor against Muslims living in Greece was first broached by the Norwegian Fritjof Nansen (1861-1930), who had been the League of Nations' High Commissioner for refugees since 1919. It was quickly taken up by the Greek government.

¹⁵ Terms like Cilicia are very problematical. European diplomats and officers with their classical education tended to refer to the areas whose future fate they discussed with the terminology of antiquity ("Macedonia, Palestine, Cilicia, and, indeed, Armenia"), but these, of course, did not correspond to any Ottoman administrative division, so this usage could and did give rise to misunderstandings and confusion.

¹⁶ Vahé Tachjian, *La France en Cilicie et en Haute-Mésopotamie. Aux confins de la Turquie, de la Syrie et de l'Irak (1919-1933)*, Paris, éditions Karthala, 2004, 465 p. The Kemalist persecution of the surviving Armenians is often overlooked by historians who disregard the continuities between the Young Turk and Kemalist periods.

The inflow of three quarters of a million refugees posed almost insurmountable housing problems in Greece and the removal of the 600.000 Muslims in Greece would go some way towards alleviating the problem, as the vacated homes of the Muslims could be used to re-house the immigrants. Greece had some experience with population exchanges by now. A clause allowing the exchange (on a voluntary basis) of 92.000 Bulgarians against 46.000 Greeks had already been inserted into the peace agreement of Neuilly with Bulgaria, concluded in August 1920.

Nansen was given the green light by the League of Nations to explore the possibilities of an exchange on 14 November 1922, one week before the start of the peace negotiations between Great Britain, France, Italy and Greece on the one hand and Turkey on the other in Lausanne. Turkey agreed in principle, on condition that the Turkish-Muslim population of Western Thrace (for which the Turkish delegation in Lausanne demanded a plebiscite on inclusion in Turkey or Greece) would be exempt. In return, the Greeks then demanded an exemption for the Greek-Orthodox inhabitants of Constantinople. During the protracted peace negotiations in Lausanne a convention was concluded between the two countries on 30 January 1923. It covered those “Turkish nationals of Greek Orthodox religion and Greek nationals of the Moslem religion” who had emigrated voluntarily or had been forced to emigrate since 18 October 1912 (the date of Greece’s declaration of war at the start of the Balkan War). This of course included those groups who had remained in their place but would now be forced to emigrate for the first time. The convention came into force when it was included in the peace treaty of Lausanne concluded on 24 July 1923.

Three things are remarkable about the convention. In the first place the criterion was exclusively religious. There was no reference to linguistic categories or to ethnic ones. The majority of the Muslims from Macedonia were Greek speaking and a considerable proportion of the Greek Orthodox of Central Anatolia spoke Turkish. Nevertheless, these groups were earmarked for migration on the grounds of their religion. This confirms the degree to which religion had become an ethnic marker in the previous decades. In the second place, there was the retroactive character of the convention: it was not limited to the migrations which had started in 1922, but legitimized all of the – largely forced – migrations caused by the wars, which had taken place since 1912. In the third place, there was the involuntary nature of the migration. This was the first time that compulsory migration, or – to give it a more honest name – deportation, was

legalized under international law.¹⁷ By this time, demographic engineering on this scale had achieved a high degree of legitimacy, as is demonstrated by the fact that the League of Nations had no hesitation in involving itself through Nansen.

The events of the gruesome years between 1912 and 1923 left a rump state in Anatolia as the successor of the Ottoman Empire. The population of this state was 98 percent Muslims, where the population of the same territory before the wars had been about eighty percent Muslim. A few months after the conclusion of the Treaty of Lausanne this rump state would be turned into the Republic of Turkey. The political leadership of this new republic soon rejected the Muslim identity that had become the dominant ethnic marker in the preceding decades and embarked on a nation-building programme designed to turn Anatolian Muslims into Turks. That phase, too belongs to the history of demographic engineering, but no longer of that of empire.

An interesting and important question is whether we should already see the genocidal policies of the Young Turk government during World War I as part of the nation-building process. In other words: Can we say that, while the form of empire survived, its substance had already undergone a metamorphosis before the end of World War I and basically had become a national state in imperial guise. This would construct a continuity between the ethnic cleansing of the Young Turks and the homogenizing policies of the republic, directed primarily against the Kurdish population, in the Twenties and Thirties.

¹⁷Erik Jan Zürcher, Griechisch-orthodoxe und muslimische Flüchtlinge und Deportierte in Griechenland und der Türkei seit 1912, in: Klaus J. Bade et al. (ed.), *Enzyklopädie Migration in Europa Vom 17. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, Paderborn/München: Ferdinand Schöningh/Wilhelm Fink, 2007, 623-627.