

are refusing to comply with the union's constitutive principle of problem-sharing (this time in regards to the refugee crisis and refugee resettlement across the EU).

On the other hand, one can see radicalisation also in the intensification of emancipatory practices resulting from the refugee crisis moment. Societal networks of solidarity mobilised quickly in response across different countries, while states, governments and official organisations seemed clueless and slow to respond. One needs to consider here that many sub-state actors such as international NGOs and aid agencies all too often acquiesce too easily to their main donors' geopolitical agendas and shape their programmes according to these. For instance, Pamela DeLargy (2016: 6) highlights the reluctance of aid organisations to respond to the grim conditions at the refugee camp in Calais to avoid angering donor governments while being active in Darfur or Mosul. In this respect, the 'radicalisation' of trans-European solidarity movements not co-opted into or resisting these long-term geopolitical strategies and interests presents a landscape of potential for much-needed political change in relation to the refugee crisis. Of course, this radicalisation at the grass-roots level is not without the dangers of attracting groups with reactionary, xenophobic or repressive agendas.

During times when intensified complexity reigns over sociopolitical phenomena due to the dense interconnections between local, regional and global politics, treating radicalisation as a form means understanding such phenomena more clearly and providing the tools for distinguishing between radicalisation that can be dangerous and that which can be beneficial for democratic politics.

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A British participant in an aid convoy to the Calais refugee camp, June 2016 (photo by Alisdare Hickson used under a creative commons license: <https://flic.kr/p/HmiVTy>)

Remembering displacement as a means of reconciliation? Towards a comparative approach

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Achieving success in reconciliation efforts is far from a linear process. This is especially so in the case of *historical conflicts* where long-enduring mutually negative perceptions reign. Turkish-Greek or Turkish-Armenian relations are paradigmatic of this. In cases like these, the ability to overcome the effects of prejudice and mistrust qualifies as one of the most important preconditions for solving bilateral disputes. Therefore, the creation of *empathy* across societies stands, rightfully, as a widely recognised criterion for the success of reconciliation initiatives (Çuhada, Gültekin-Punsmann 2012: 42). *Displacement*, on the other hand, has been an effect of such historical conflicts, carrying a heavy emotional/affective load and linking the past to the present. Memories of displacement are not abstract. They are often based on real experiences of personal, family or community pain and loss, and they are transmitted from generation to generation. Furthermore, the material traces of displacement (the leaving behind of the family house and the village mosque or church, etc.) appear as reminders of a painful past.

This short article examines some of the issues regarding the comparability of reconciliation processes and the possible uses of such a comparison, with examples drawn from the Turkish-Greek and Turkish-Armenian cases. More specifically, it looks at some prospects and challenges of rethinking displacement and its affectiveness as a means of reconciliation.

Displacement as mutual trauma in the history of Turkish-Greek relations

The two-way flow of people between Greece and Turkey in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, both in the form of irregular, violence-ridden displacement and as an organised population exchange, represents one of the largest forced movements of people in contemporary European history. Until recently, in both Turkey and Greece the historical burden of this past of collective pain, exile and loss was the source of competing national narratives of victimhood, righteousness and blame. It fed national traumas and stimulated collective (but different in each case) 'symptoms'.

In the Turkish case, the symptoms took the form of a *collective forgetting*. Muslim refugee populations from the Balkans, the Aegean islands and Crete were expected to symbolically erase their connections to places of family origin and block their memories of loss (of lands, of people, of roots) in favour of solidifying their links and affiliation to their new nation state (İğsiz 2008: 451). Public memory of these 'origins' or commemoration of such links remained taboo for almost 100 years after the establishment of the Turkish Republic.

In the Greek case, the symptom was reversed; instead of silence, there was a loud excess of discourses. Initially, the trauma was soothed by commemorating the abandoned lands as ‘lost homelands’ – *hamenes patriides* – through the establishment of refugee cultural associations. Gradually, however, the discourse of ‘lost homelands’ was replaced by that of *alytrotos patriides* (that is, the ‘non-liberated homelands’), setting nationalistic/irredentist overtones of remembering, which deeply affected the third generation of refugee descendants and their associations during the 1980s and 1990s (Liakos 1998). Still, despite the radically different symptoms, the result was largely the same on either side of the Aegean: silent or vociferous monologues where the national ‘self’ finds its place as hero or victim and the ‘other’ is characterised as the perpetrator of crimes.

The return to the homeland revisited

An undeniable success of the Turkish-Greek reconciliation process has been the reversal of these two symptoms. During the 1980s and 1990s, when nationalist sentiments reigned in both countries, a small but vibrant movement for Turkish-Greek reconciliation was born on both sides of the Aegean (Karakatsanis 2014). One of the movement’s first achievements was the realisation that the period of suffering, loss and displacement was a mutual history, shared by both societies. The twinning of projects between Greek and Turkish towns of origin or destination for the displaced became a vehicle for community reflection and the creation of mutual empathy. The positive climate that emerged after the exchange of disaster aid in the aftermath of the deadly earthquakes that hit first Turkey and then Greece in 1999 gave a further boost to these initiatives. A new wave of civil-society projects, driven by the need of the communities to co-explore their roots across the border, flourished.

Before these initiatives, a visit to Turkey by descendants of Greek refugees in order to find a grandparent’s family house would usually take the form of a homage to the ‘lost homeland’ involving entry into a ‘hostile’ territory. Such a visit was typically carried out in secrecy or privately. For the Turkish descendants of refugee families, such practices were unthinkable before 1999: there was nothing to be sought on the ‘other side’, since no public forms of remembering were nurtured. Today, the effects of change are easily traced. The discourse of ‘non-liberated homelands’ has been completely abandoned in Greece. Many refugee cultural associations organise frequent trips to Turkey and build links with the local communities there. In Turkey, flourishing research on the past of the Muslim presence in the southern Balkans, the Aegean islands and Crete is evident (Kehriotis 2011). The establishment of the Foundation of Exchanged Populations (Lozan Mübadilleri Vakfı) in Istanbul in 2001, followed by the formation of several local associations all around the country, exposed the concealed past of displacement in a new light: as a shared – with the ‘other’ – painful experience.



Panagitsa village in northern Greece: a common prayer for deceased ancestors by Turkish and Greek descendants of the population exchange (source: *Milliyet* newspaper)

Can success be copied? Reflections on the Turkish-Armenian rapprochement

Having oscillated between pre-negotiation and negotiation stages for years, Turkish-Armenian reconciliation is still an ongoing process (Çuhadar, Gültekin-Punsmann 2012: 13–14). Despite the abandonment of the official rapprochement since 2010, initiatives at the civil-society level continue on the part of a brave generation of activists, scholars and artists on both sides of the border.

As in the Turkish-Greek case, this is a process in which memories of the past stand as the most significant barrier to overcoming sharply opposing narratives of selfhood and otherhood. The Turkish-Armenian and Turkish-Greek reconciliation processes seem to be linked in various other ways as well. For instance, the sharp growth in Turkish-Armenian civil-society activities devoted to rapprochement recorded in 2001–2002 (Çuhadar, Gültekin-Punsmann 2012: 17) came after the unprecedented boom in 1999–2001 of similar NGO involvement in Turkish-Greek rapprochement (Karakatsanis 2014: 209). Many practitioners active in the latter case applied, in turn, the experience they had gained to Turkish-Armenian reconciliation projects. Following the 2011 earthquake in Van, Armenia and Turkey attempted to reiterate the previously successful pattern of disaster aid exchange, with Armenia sending rescue teams to the region; however, a change of climate similar to that seen in the Turkish-Greek case did not follow.

Taking into account these contact points between the two cases, it seems reasonable to ask whether Turkish-Greek rapprochement could provide a ‘best practice’ example for incorporating displacement into the reconciliation process. In other words, can the positive change that took place in Turkish-Greek relations be copied? Can the memory of displacement and loss be transformed from a cause for hatred into a means of contact?

In her unpublished ethnographic research, Araz Kojayan (2014) followed Lebanese members of the Armenian youth diaspora who were visiting Turkey. Such visits, argues



An abandoned Armenian church in a Turkish village in the district of Van. The old photo on the column commemorates a visit by the Armenian patriarch (photo by the author)

Kojayan, were mainly aimed at experiencing the ‘imagined homeland’ of ‘western Armenia’. Therefore, the journeys were usually disappointing to the visitors, since they did not find the place they expected. Instead, they saw Armenian cultural heritage in decay and felt like they were visiting a hostile and strange land rather than a lost ‘home’.

Such an account seems to stand in sharp contrast to the celebrated visits of Greek and Turkish descendants to their ancestors’ homelands during the last 20 years. However, if one looks further back, to the time when *alytotes patriides* (the ‘non-liberated homelands’) dominated the discourse of the descendants of Greek refugees, the image ceases to be so different. Is it, then, just a matter of the two processes for reconciliation being at different *stages*?

This forms the fundamental research question of my new project, to be pursued over the next three years, which involves a comparative examination of processes of and prospects for rapprochement in the wider region. A few reflections will be presented here in the form of two initial hypotheses.

Affective balances, silences and echoes

The first hypothesis is that the distance to be covered in the Turkish-Armenian case is much greater than in the Turkish-Greek; the main reason for this is that, for the latter, an *affective balance* of empathy has been easier to achieve. As long as they both take the brave step of self-reflection, ‘Greeks’ and ‘Turks’ share the tragic ‘luxury’ of having balanceable collective narratives when talking about memories of displacement and loss: the ethnic cleansing of Muslims during the Greek revolution of 1821 in the Peloponnese alongside the massacres by the Ottoman and Egyptian armies; the displacement of the Muslims of Thessaly and Macedonia alongside the violent exodus of the Orthodox population of Anatolia; the brutalities of the occupying Greek forces during 1919–1922 alongside the atrocities of the Turkish irregulars pushing Greeks out of the coastal region of Asia Minor. In the Turkish-Armenian case,

any similar effort to balance the narratives usually falls into the trap of what S. Kasbarian and K. Öktem (2014: 124) call a ‘neo-denialism’ – i.e. a position that ‘accepts some measure of Armenian suffering, but seeks to offset this against Turks’ and Muslims’ experience of uprooting and warfare throughout the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth century’. In this respect it is doubtful whether this strategy – successful in the Turkish-Greek case – can prove helpful here.

The second hypothesis is that breaking with silence and taboos can have significantly positive and diffusing effects. Silence, in fact, has been a *symptom* that cuts across both reconciliation processes alike. Lifting one silence (like that related to the roots of Muslim refugees from the west) might mean opening up the possibility of lifting others, too. The engagement of Turkish scholars with what only a few years ago appeared an absolute anathema – the word ‘genocide’ – can be seen as a positive development. At the same time, lifting silence might also mean inviting the ‘other’ to lower their voice and listen. This worked successfully, in fact, for the abandonment of Greek society’s vocal claims over ‘lost’ or ‘non-liberated homelands’.

If there are a few ‘lessons’ to learn from the Turkish-Greek rapprochement process, the first is that such shifts can only happen when societies work in tandem to nurture a mutual self-reflection regarding both their past and their present. The other lesson is that progress cannot be predicted. Building on the small successes fostered by civil society for creating points of contact and waiting for the right opportunity to diffuse them across society and policy makers should be the strategy adopted.

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