A NATION CONSTRUCTED: FORCED MIGRATION, NATIONAL HOMOGENEITY, AND THE LEGACY OF LAUSANNE IN MODERN GREECE

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In 1923, Ilias Venezis arrived in Greece for the first time, a stranger delivering himself to a country that claimed him as its own. He was nineteen, born and raised in the mountain village of Aeolia in the heart of Asia Minor, a place he had never once left. He knew the smell of its fig trees, the particular quality of light on its hillsides in summer, the faces of its people. He did not know Greece. However, the League of Nations had decided he was Greek, so he crossed the water as a refugee, returning home to somewhere he had never been.[1]

Before Venezis was a writer, he was a survivor. In 1922, in the chaos that followed the Greek military defeat at the hands of Turkish nationalist forces, he was conscripted into a Turkish labor battalion alongside thousands of other young Greek men from Asia Minor. Of the roughly 3,000 men in his battalion, he was one of twenty-three who survived. He was eighteen years old. The following year, under the terms of the Treaty of Lausanne, he was formally classified as Greek and expelled from the only home he had ever known. He arrived in Greece with nothing — no possessions, no connections, no map for what came next. In the years that followed, he would write novels that yearned for his homeland, conjuring his childhood back to life.[2] It is a book about belonging to a place that had been taken away. It is also, quietly, a book about what it means to be told that you belong somewhere else.

Venezis was not alone in this displacement. His story, in its broad outlines, holds true for approximately 1.2 million Turkish-born ethnic Greeks who were uprooted from Asia Minor, Eastern Thrace, and the Black Sea coast and forced to remake their lives in Greece under the terms of the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. In the same exchange, roughly 400,000 Muslims were expelled from Greece into Turkey. These were not voluntary migrations. People were identified

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[1] *Venezēs, Ēlias, and Lawrence Durrell. Aeolia. William Campion, 1949.*
[2] *"Ilias Venezis." 2026. Deniseharveypublisher.Gr. 2026. Https://Deniseharveypublisher.Gr/People/Ilias-Venezis.* .

not by language, culture, or where they had lived their entire lives, but by religion.[3] Families who had lived in Anatolia for generations were classified, processed, and transported to a country many of them had never visited, whose language some of them did not speak.

Overnight, these 1.2 million people were tasked with building a life from scratch in a country that was simultaneously expected to absorb them. It was a task of staggering proportions for a nation already economically hollowed out by a decade of continuous warfare — the Balkan Wars, the First World War, and the catastrophic Asia Minor campaign had left Greece financially exhausted, politically unstable, and now suddenly responsible for a refugee population that represented nearly a quarter of its total inhabitants.[4]

The Treaty of Lausanne was a peace agreement for the 1922 Greco-Turkish War, in which Greek forces attempted to claim the Eastern Thrace, still belonging to Turkey. This conflict was catalyzed by the Megali Idea, a notion championed by Greek intellectuals and politicians that all ethnic Greeks should be united in a singular exclusive country.[5] While the Eastern Thrace remained in Turkish hands, the Treaty of Lausanne marked a monumental shift in Greek history and demographics, aided by the League of Nations and the Western powers. With the forced migration of over 400,000 Muslims out of Greece and into Turkey, the Treaty meant that Greece would from then on be largely ethnically and religiously homogenous.[6]

The Treaty of Lausanne and the resettlement that followed it did not create a unified Greek nation so much as it exposed how contested and unstable the quest for homogeneity had

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[3] *The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. 2019. "Treaty of Lausanne | Allies-Turkey [1923] | Britannica." In Encyclopædia Britannica.*
[4] *Dakin, Douglas. The Unification of Greece, 1770-1923. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972.*190.
[5] *Dakin, Douglas. The Unification of Greece, 1770-1923. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972.* 73-87.
[6] "Treaty of Peace with Turkey Signed at Lausanne, July 24, 1923. League of Nations Treaty Series, Vol. 28, Pp. 11-113."

always been. At the time, the Refugee Settlement Commission declared the resettlement a triumph of humanitarian administration, pointing to agricultural productivity gains, new industries, and the absorption of over a million refugees as proof that Greece had risen to meet an extraordinary challenge.[7] Decades later, Elie Murard's 2001 survey data on intermarriage rates and institutional trust appeared to confirm this narrative of eventual success.[8] However, both accounts obscure more than they reveal. The Commission's own reports show that as late as 1929 two thirds of refugees still lacked permanent housing, that agricultural productivity fell well short of targets, yet violent conflict between refugees and native Greeks was quietly acknowledged and then set aside.[9] The experience of refugees in urban neighborhoods tells a different story entirely. What the Commission called success was in fact a managed inadequacy, one that produced not integration but a fragile and contested coexistence whose fault lines would resurface in Greek responses to Albanian migrants in the 1980s and Syrian refugees in 2015. To call the population swap a success is not only to dismiss the lived experience of those it displaced, but to miss the deeper instability it left behind.

The failures of the Refugee Settlement Commission did not dissolve when the Commission itself did. What persisted was something harder to dismantle than an institution: a definition of Greekness constructed around Orthodox Christianity and European identity,

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[7] *Morgenthau, Henry, and French Strothers. "I Was Sent to Athens." In Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1929. 327 Pp. 1929.*; "Hill, Martin. 'The League of Nations and the Work of Refugee Settlement and Financial Reconstruction in Greece, 1922—1930.' Weltwirtschaftliches Archiv 34 (1931): 265–83. Http://Www.Jstor.Org/Stable/40418916."; "League of Nations. The Settlement of Greek Refugees: Scheme for an International Loan. Nancy, 1924."; "GREEK REFUGEES. SPECIAL REPORT TO THE COUNCIL OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS BY THE GREEK REFUGEE SETTLEMENT COMMISSION."

[8] *Murard, Elie. "Long-Term Effects of the 1923 Mass Refugee Inflow on Social Cohesion in Greece." World Development 170 (2023): 106311. Https://Doi.Org/10.1016/j.Worlddev.2023.106311.*

[9] "League of Nations. The Settlement of Greek Refugees: Scheme for an International Loan. Nancy, 1924."; *Morgenthau, Henry, and French Strothers. "I Was Sent to Athens." In Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1929. 327 Pp. 1929.*

reinforced by decades of political culture and never seriously interrogated because the homogenous nation it had produced was treated as a success rather than a project. When Albanian migrants began arriving in Greece in significant numbers in the 1980s, they encountered a society that had spent sixty years consolidating an identity built on their exclusion. The hostility they faced was not simply economic anxiety or postwar nationalism, but the active inheritance of a classification system that had sorted human beings by religion in 1923 and had never fully abandoned that logic. The same framework that made a Turkish-speaking Orthodox Christian "Greek enough" to be expelled from Anatolia made a Christian Albanian "not Greek enough" to be welcomed in Athens. Lausanne did not cause the migration crisis of the 1980s or the xenophobia of 2015, but it established the terms in which both can be understood.

The historiography of the 1923 population exchange and its aftermath draws on a range of diplomatic, economic, and social histories, but it is worth noting at the outset that this body of scholarship is remarkably thin relative to the scale of what it documents. The forced displacement of 1.2 million people has generated far less sustained historical attention than comparable episodes of twentieth-century displacement. This is not incidental. The same nationalist logic that framed the exchange as a rational, even humanitarian solution to an ethnic problem has also shaped what gets remembered and studied about it. A resettlement declared a success by its administrators, endorsed by Western powers, and absorbed into a narrative of Greek national consolidation does not invite the same historiographical scrutiny as a catastrophe. The silences in the scholarship mirror the silences in Morgenthau's report.

Within that constrained field, Douglas *Dakin's The Unification of Greece, 1770–1923* provides the foundational political narrative, tracing Greek nationalist ideology and the Megali

Idea from independence through the catastrophe of 1922.[10] The Treaty of Lausanne itself is documented in the League of Nations Treaty Series, and the mechanics of refugee resettlement are detailed in the League's own publications, particularly the 1924 Loan Scheme and Martin Hill's 1931 retrospective assessment of the Commission's decade of work. Henry Morgenthau's *I Was Sent to Athens* (1929) offers the most prominent insider account of the Commission's operations, though its optimism and omissions make it as useful as a primary source as it is problematic as an analysis.[11] It is, in many ways, the historiographical problem in miniature. Peter Bien's "Inventing Greece" and Yanni Kotsonis's 2021 essay, "1821, Before and After," both in the Journal of Modern Greek Studies, provide critical frameworks for understanding how Greek national identity was constructed around Western and Christian categories, a process that directly shaped who was classified as Greek or Turkish in the exchange itself.[12] That the most searching critical work on this period appears in a specialized journal of Modern Greek studies, rather than in the broader literature on nationalism or forced migration, is itself suggestive of how contained this conversation has remained.

The social and economic consequences of resettlement have received more granular treatment in recent scholarship, though even here the field reveals telling gaps. The most rigorous work tends to be narrow in scope and much of it has appeared only in the last few decades, suggesting that the harder questions about what the resettlement actually produced for the people it displaced have taken a long time to become askable. That the definitive ethnographic account of urban refugee communities is based on fieldwork conducted fifty years

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[10] *Dakin, Douglas. The Unification of Greece, 1770-1923. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972.*
[11] *Morgenthau, Henry, and French Strothers. "I Was Sent to Athens." In Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1929. 327 Pp. 1929.*
[12] *Bien, Peter. "Inventing Greece." Journal of Modern Greek Studies (Baltimore) 23, No. 2 (2005): 217–34. Https://Doi.Org/10.1353/Mgs.2005.0015.*; *Kotsonis, Yanni. "1821, Before and After." Journal of Modern Greek Studies 39, No. 1 (2021): Vii–Xii. Https://Doi.Org/10.1353/Mgs.2021.*

after the exchange, and that a major study of refugee political agency appeared as recently as 2025, points to how slowly the historiography has caught up with the human reality of what happened. The success narrative, it seems, had a long half-life.

Renée Hirschon's *Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe*, based on fieldwork in Kokkinia in the early 1970s, remains the definitive ethnographic account of urban refugee communities and their decades-long struggle with inadequate infrastructure and political marginalization, and the fact that it took an anthropologist doing fieldwork half a century later to produce this account is itself a comment on what official histories chose not to document.[13] Elie Murard's 2023 article in World Development takes the longest view, using survey data to argue for eventual social cohesion by 2001, though as this essay will argue, his conclusions require careful contextualization: the integration he measures was produced by transformations in Greek society that had little to do with the Commission's work.[14]

The goal of Greek national homogeneity was not new for the Greeks, or for the West. Rather, the desire for Greece to be uniquely Western, and therefore homogenous, was the reason that Greece existed in the first place. In 1822, Greek intellectuals produced a declaration of independence that referred to Greece as one of the “civilized, enlightened, nations of Europe,” and to the war as a “national” and “holy” war. It states that the object of the war was to “reconquer the rights of individual liberty, of property and honor, – rights which the civilized people of Europe, [their] neighbors, enjoy today.” Later in the document, the writers express Greece as “desiring to assimilate [itself] to the rest of the Christians of Europe, [their]

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[13] *HIRSCHON, RENÉE. Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe: The Social Life of Asia Minor Refugees in Piraeus. 1st Ed. Berghahn Books, 2023. Https://Doi.Org/10.2307/Jj.5501125.*

[14] *Murard, Elie. “Long-Term Effects of the 1923 Mass Refugee Inflow on Social Cohesion in Greece.” World Development 170 (2023): 106311. Https://Doi.Org/10.1016/j.Worlddev.2023.106311.*

brethren."[15] A clear driving force of the Greek War of Independence was the desire to be seen as a Christian and European nation, even though Greece was still composed of a variety of different ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups. Yet these sentiments were enough to carry Greece through a revolution.

When the Greek War for Independence ended in 1830, Greece was left in disarray. With no money, war-torn cities and countryside, and no recent political or constitutional traditions of its own, it was clear that rebuilding required assistance. With the 1830 London Protocol, Greece was put under a protectorate by France, Russia, and Great Britain, and Athens, a city of 15,000 people, became the capital. A Bavarian king, Otho, was installed and tasked with rekindling Athens' ancient glory. [16]

At the end of the Greek War for Independence, the land that occupies modern Greece was home to a variety of groups with various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, along with significant populations of Muslims and Jews. The fact that Greece became not only a Western nation, but a *Christian* nation was an intentional choice. A nation that was entirely composed of one religion, Christianity specifically, was an entirely un-Ottoman way of existing.[17] Thus, it is unsurprising that this became a founding pillar of this new version of Greece. Religious, ethnic, and linguistic diversity were seen as barriers for nation-building by the Three Powers and the Bavarians, so Greek Orthodoxy as a national religion seemed like a logical step. Notably, in

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[15] "Greek Declaration of Independence, 1822."
[16] *Dakin, Douglas. The Unification of Greece, 1770-1923. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972.* 67-73
[17] *Kotsonis, Yanni. "1821, Before and After." Journal of Modern Greek Studies 39, No. 1 (2021): Vii–Xii. Https://Doi.Org/10.1353/Mgs.2021.* Ix.

identifying who would be considered ethnically Greek and who would be ethnically Turkish in the 1923 population swap, religion would be the primary deciding factor.[18]

As Greece established itself, this goal was at the forefront of national and foreign policy. Entering the 20th century, the idea that Greece was the original founder of Western glory resonated with the Greek people, and Muslim populations interfered with that. At the same time, Greece still did not consider itself to be complete. Turkey still occupied Constantinople, the headquarters of the Greek Orthodox Church, and former Greek capital before Ottoman rule. The Greek government saw Asia Minor as its rightful territory and embarked on a variety of crusades to reclaim this land.[19]

These decades of conflict and contestation over territory culminated with the Treaty of Lausanne, where peace negotiations forced Greece give up on its goal of reuniting its entire homeland, but gave it consolation in the fact that the homeland it *did* have, would be almost entirely Christian, and therefore entirely Western. The implementation of this treaty, though, was no easy feat. Although Greece could utilize the land of the newly departed ethnic Turks, it would still face the feat of accommodating a surplus of almost one million refugees, most of whom had no job, no possessions, and to no fault of their own, no plan.

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[18] *Bien, Peter. "Inventing Greece." Journal of Modern Greek Studies (Baltimore) 23, No. 2 (2005): 217–34. Https://Doi.Org/10.1353/Mgs.2005.0015.* 226-228.
[19] *Venturas, Lina. "Multi-Actor Synergies, Sovereignty, and Refugee Resettlement in Interwar Greece." Journal of Modern Greek Studies (BALTIMORE) 40, No. 2 (2022): 299–317. Https://Doi.Org/10.1353/Mgs.2022.0023.* 305.

A map outlining territory concessions and gains from conflicts between Greece and Turkey (or the Ottoman Empire) from 1807 up to the Treaty of Lausanne.[20]

For this reason, the League of Nations, also involved in treaty negotiations, set up the Refugee Settlement Commission, which would be tasked with finding ways in which the Greek state could provide housing, food, and employment opportunities for these new refugees. The Commission was led by Henry Morgenthau, former U.S. ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, John Campbell, an American member of the Indian Civil Service, Etienne Delta, an advisor to the National Bank of Greece, and Pericles Argyropoulos the former Greek minister at Oslo.[21]

[20] The Greek Herald, *Treaty of Lausanne Map*.
[21] "League of Nations. The Settlement of Greek Refugees: Scheme for an International Loan. Nancy, 1924." 13.

While the Commission would initiate plans for refugees, they could not do so without funds. Initially, no country was willing to provide Greece with a loan, cautious of the country's financial and political instability. It held extensive debts from its Ottoman wars and had been unable to hold a political system for an extended period, let alone a democratic one. After extensive negotiations, the Bank of England finally agreed to give Greece the loan it needed. The loan was given out in yearly parts and ended up totaling 12.5 million pounds with an 8.89 percent interest rate.[22]

Seeing that the refugees would not only need housing, but jobs, the Commission decided to focus its efforts on Northern Macedonia and the Western Thrace. These areas had larger areas of land that had been abandoned by ethnic Turks and had significantly more land that could be used for farming than other regions of Greece. Cognizant of the limitations of throwing inexperienced urban dwellers into a livelihood involving farming, the Commission attempted to concentrate the majority of previously urban dwellers in Athens and concentrate those who had previous farming expertise in Northern Greece. However, while this attempt was well-meaning, it was merely an attempt. Many refugees who had never farmed in their lives had no choice but to take farming up as a new career based on where they'd been placed by the Commission, even though the Commission had noted the potential shortcomings of this plan. That being said, the Commission did its best to provide refugees with the tools to succeed as farmers. It assigned plots of land to each family and provided them with livestock, seeds, and plows.[23]

In creating housing for the refugees, the Commission had the advantage that the Greek countryside consisted mainly of religiously homogenous villages. Not only did this mean that

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[22] "League of Nations. The Settlement of Greek Refugees: Scheme for an International Loan. Nancy, 1924." 13.
[23] "Hill, Martin. 'The League of Nations and the Work of Refugee Settlement and Financial Reconstruction in Greece, 1922—1930.' Weltwirtschaftliches Archiv 34 (1931): 265–83. Http://Www.Jstor.Org/Stable/40418916." 5.

they could place some refugees in entirely abandoned villages that already existed, but they could build entirely new villages for refugees, rather than forcing widespread intermingling with Greeks that already lived there, which intended to minimize land disputes and conflict.[24]

Providing refugees with food and healthcare to refugees would be a feat of its own. The American Red Cross aided the Commission in this extensively. Upon their arrival in Greece, refugees were so hungry and ill that the death to birth ratio in the country was 3:1. This situation carried into 1924, where refugees died by the thousands of malaria, paratyphoid, typhoid, and dysentery. By 1925, the birth to death ratio had evened out, thanks to effort by the American Red Cross to provide refugees with food, and widespread vaccination and hygiene initiatives by the Commission.[25]

The Commission's own reports present its work as broadly effective, acknowledging imperfections only in passing and framing them as temporary problems on the way to an inevitable success. No one embodied this outlook more than Henry Morgenthau, who in 1929 published an extensive account of Greece six years after the Treaty. In this report, he speaks highly of the Greek people and refugees, noting their virility and productivity multiple times. He speaks of their economic and industrial potential, their unique ability to adjust to such dire conditions, and their enthusiasm. Proud to the point of boastfulness, Morgenthau describes his work with the Commission as such:

"This challenge to Greece's 'humanity and resource fulness' it met most magnificently. It fed and sheltered this great army of brothers from Asia Minor, granted them immediate citizenship, and promptly evolved a plan to absorb them into the life of the nation. Six years ago, I was sent to Athens to become the

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[24] *Morgenthau, Henry, and French Strothers. "I Was Sent to Athens." In Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1929. 327 Pp. 1929* 96.; "League of Nations. The Settlement of Greek Refugees: Scheme for an International Loan. Nancy, 1924."27

[25] "Hill, Martin. 'The League of Nations and the Work of Refugee Settlement and Financial Reconstruction in Greece, 1922—1930.' Weltwirtschaftliches Archiv 34 (1931): 265–83. 4. Http://Www.Jstor.Org/Stable/40418916."

first chairman of the Refugee Settlement Commission, the international agency set up by the League of Nations to plan and supervise the staggering work of repatriating million-odd destitute refugees from Asia Minor. What I saw six years ago, when the first chaos of a great calamity seemed to have caused a hopeless disorganization of a nation's life, and what I saw last year, when I again visited Greece accompanied by my collaborator, French Strother, and found the Greeks of their Great Exodus established in orderly urban and rural settlements, busy at the normal tasks of daily life, affords such a striking contrast, and is so wonderful a demonstration of the force of human character, that I feel the story will be read with eager interest wherever men take pride in glorious achievement."

However, Morgenthau's account of the Commission's success warrants scrutiny. His narrative of the Greek situation as a success is not only naïve, but uncomplicated and incomplete. As Morgenthau himself fleetingly mentions, only one third of the refugees had permanent housing by 1929. Despite over three hundred pages of writing, the desolate refugees in camps outside of Athens and Thessaloniki go mentioned but unscrutinized as Morgenthau repeatedly venerates the potential of agricultural productivity in the farmlands of Northern Greece.[26]

To Morgenthau's credit, the influx of refugees did plant the seeds for new industry to emerge. Many refugees were skilled in rug making and silk harvesting, industries that Greece had not previously explored. Furthermore, refugees began to cultivate areas that could be used for tobacco production. The Commission also led a widespread and effective effort to create effective drainage and flood prevention systems on refugee land.[27]

The potential that Morgenthau describes was not only isolated but limited. Ultimately, it was nothing more than exactly what he describes: *potential.* On the heels of the Great Depression, Morgenthau's hope for Greek economic prosperity would soon be crushed.

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[26] *Morgenthau, Henry, and French Strothers. "I Was Sent to Athens." In Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1929. 327 Pp. 1929.* 153-154.

[27] "Kritikos, Georgios. 'The Agricultural Settlement of Refugees: A Source of Productive Work and Stability in Greece, 1923-1930.' Agricultural History 79, No. 3 (Summer, 2005): 321-346. Https://Link.Ezproxy.Neu.Edu/Login?Url=https://Www.Proquest.Com/Scholarly-Journals/Agricultural-Settlement-Refugees-Source/Docview/198066339/Se-2."13.

However, the narrative of flourishing economic potential crushed by an economic depression alone also tells an incomplete story.

While Northern Greece embarked on its alleged journey towards prosperity with the arrival of the refugees, the rest of Greece faced an exodus. Beginning in around 1880, rural peasants, many of whom were from the Peloponnese region of Greece, began to emigrate to the United States and Australia.[28] Political and economic turmoil meant that they no longer saw a future in Greece with roots stemming long before the Treaty. Yet, the Treaty put no stop to this. Not only did this wave of emigration continue through the 1920s and slowed in the 1930s, but peasants began to stage revolts.[29]

In 1925, peasants in Thessaly began to occupy church lands in rebellion to land reform and the sharecropping system.[30] Notably, this protest was widespread, organized, and militant. Rather than a simple evasion of property lines, this was an active display of discontent reflecting the struggles that peasants faced under the sharecropping system.

Beginning in the 1880s, the Greek state began to focus efforts on improving production of cash crops like tobacco. To do so, they relied on a sharecropping system in which peasants who worked on lands didn't have access to its production. In addition to the fact that these peasants were paid scantily and faced harsh labor conditions, the idea of working on land and not seeing the profits from it was a new concept for many Greeks. Up until this point, the peasantry

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[28] "Danopoulos, Andrew C, and Constantine P Danopoulos. 'Albanian Migration into Greece: The Economic, Sociological, and Security Implications.' Mediterranean Quarterly 15, No. 4 (2004): 100–114. Https://Doi.Org/10.1215/10474552-15-4-100."

[29] *Anastasopoulou, Marilena, "A Brief History of Migration in Greece", A Century of Asia Minor Refugees in Greece: Flight, Fight, and Fraternity (Oxford, 2026; Online Edn, Oxford Academic, 19 Jan. 2026), Https://Doi.Org/10.1093/9780198970996.003.0002*.

[30] *Seferiades, Seraphim. "Small Rural Ownership, Subsistence Agriculture, and Peasant Protest in Interwar Greece: The Agrarian Question Recast." Journal of Modern Greek Studies (Baltimore, Md) 17, No. 2 (1999): 277–323. Https://Doi.Org/10.1353/Mgs.1999.0034.* 279.

had sustained itself in an agrarian system where the farmers who worked on the land were the ones who sold its products. This meant that sharecropping peasants, who expected to in some way see the fruits of their labor, were especially displeased.[31]

Revolts and protests continued across Greece, with revolts in Crete in 1929 and hunger strikes in Thessaly in the early 1930s. In 1934, currant worker protests in the Peloponnese morphed into rebellion, where revolutionary forces captured the town of Kyparissia in Messinia, but were later defeated by the Greek military.[32] In May of 1936 in Thessaloniki, tobacco workers went on strike and organized demonstrations to improve the sharecropping system. The strike was squashed by the Greek government, who killed twelve people in the process.[33]

Ultimately, refugee settlements existed in a different reality than peasant villages and towns. Instead of buying into the systems that kept peasants upset and economically depressed, refugees were able to take steps towards land ownership, and therefore economic success. However, self-sufficiency was not a given, despite the Commission's insistence on this goal. The refugee population of Macedonia may have been given shelter, land, and farming supplies by the commission, but the region still dealt with hunger strikes in the 1930s, just as the rest of Greece did. This is because of an alarmingly low productivity rate amongst the refugees, even though most of the loan was designated for farming and productivity.

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[31] *Seferiades, Seraphim. "Small Rural Ownership, Subsistence Agriculture, and Peasant Protest in Interwar Greece: The Agrarian Question Recast." Journal of Modern Greek Studies (Baltimore, Md) 17, No. 2 (1999): 277–323. Https://Doi.Org/10.1353/Mgs.1999.0034.* 282.

[32] *Seferiades, Seraphim. "Small Rural Ownership, Subsistence Agriculture, and Peasant Protest in Interwar Greece: The Agrarian Question Recast." Journal of Modern Greek Studies (Baltimore, Md) 17, No. 2 (1999): 277–323. Https://Doi.Org/10.1353/Mgs.1999.0034.* 279.

[33] "Srougo, Shai. 'Multivocal Narratives of a Nonviolent Campaign in the May 1936 Thessaloniki Events: Class, Ethnic, and Gender Dynamics.' Journal of Contemporary History 60, No. 4 (2025): 545–61."

Despite wheat production in Greece initially achieving the Commission's goals, and the expansion of the silk and tobacco industries, long-term economic growth and stability was not achieved. The tobacco market got to the point where two thirds of its workers were refugees, yet this labor boom made a marginal dent. Greece's two biggest exports, currant and tobacco, depended heavily on international markets, so an export increase alone would not indicate success. Seeing that the trade deficit remained the same indicates that refugees had no real impact on the improvement of the Greek economy.[34]

It is also worth noting that production alone did not necessitate success for refugees. In 1930, Greek MP F. Sarantis argued that "wheat growing is on the lowest rung of incomes and the shortage of large agricultural ownerships renders problematic the survival of the farmers who insist on wheat cultivation." Additionally, although the production of animal feed and vegetables go suspiciously unmentioned in Morgenthau's report, it fell exceedingly short of Commission expectations.[35]

Morgenthau also diminishes the possibility of conflict between refugees and Greeks that had previously been living in the areas that refugees inhabited. While, of course, rural refugees were for the most part housed in their own villages instead of assimilated into existing villages, this does not mean that disputes did not occur. By 1929, the Greek government had handed over 2.1 million acres of land to the Commission. While most of the land had come from Turks who

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[34] "Kritikos, Georgios. 'The Agricultural Settlement of Refugees: A Source of Productive Work and Stability in Greece, 1923-1930.' Agricultural History 79, No. 3 (Summer, 2005): 321-346. Https://Link.Ezproxy.Neu.Edu/Login?Url=https://Www.Proquest.Com/Scholarly-Journals/Agricultural-Settlement-Refugees-Source/Docview/198066339/Se-2." 331-334

[35] "Kritikos, Georgios. 'The Agricultural Settlement of Refugees: A Source of Productive Work and Stability in Greece, 1923-1930.' Agricultural History 79, No. 3 (Summer, 2005): 321-346. Https://Link.Ezproxy.Neu.Edu/Login?Url=https://Www.Proquest.Com/Scholarly-Journals/Agricultural-Settlement-Refugees-Source/Docview/198066339/Se-2." 335.

had fled, the Greek government expropriated about 148,000 acres from Greek people and 74,000 acres from foreign owners in Greece. Stephanos Deltas, the Greek member of the Refugee Settlement Commission, noted that "the annexation of all property, both Greek and foreign, was an unfortunate necessity which compelled the Colonization Service against its will to become disagreeable even to its best friends."[36]

Considering that the interwar period was marked by economic struggle and labor disputes for many Greek peasants, this of course was grounds for widespread anger amongst peasants. Even though the Greek government attempted to pay individuals who lost land back, discontent came not only from this, but from Greeks who had attempted to purchase abandoned Turkish land prior to the arrival of the refugees. The tension this created not only produced conflict, but massacre. Peasant Greeks began to fight refugees for fields, resulting in widespread violence and numerous deaths. In the village of Nigrita, indigenous Greeks burned all refugee huts, and in the village of Koupji, the Commission abandoned the prospect of settlement all together because of this peasant violence.[37]

Not only do these conflicts contradict the peaceful and civil nature of refugee assimilation that Morgenthau and the Commission portray, but they exemplify refugees as active political agents rather than passive victims of their situation. Upon the refugees' arrival in Greece, the Greek government gave them immediate citizenship, and therefore voting power.

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[36] "Srougo, Shai. 'Multivocal Narratives of a Nonviolent Campaign in the May 1936 Thessaloniki Events: Class, Ethnic, and Gender Dynamics.' Journal of Contemporary History 60, No. 4 (2025): 545–61."

[37] "Kritikos, Georgios. 'The Agricultural Settlement of Refugees: A Source of Productive Work and Stability in Greece, 1923-1930.' Agricultural History 79, No. 3 (Summer, 2005): 321-346. Https://Link.Ezproxy.Neu.Edu/Login?Url=https://Www.Proquest.Com/Scholarly-Journals/Agricultural-Settlement-Refugees-Source/Docview/198066339/Se-2." 331-333.

Interestingly, refugees were staunch supporters of the politician Elefterios Venizelos, whereas the native peasantry in Greece were fervent critics.[38]

Eleftherios Venizelos was a Cretan lawyer and statesman who first made his name in the struggle for Cretan autonomy from the Ottoman Empire before being invited to Athens in 1910 by reform-minded military officers who wanted him to modernize the Greek state. He proved a transformative figure almost immediately, overhauling the constitution, rebuilding the army, and then leading Greece to victories in the Balkan Wars of 1912–13 that nearly doubled the country's territory. This success made him the standard-bearer of the nationalist dream of uniting all ethnic Greeks into a single state, and his Liberal Party dominated Greek politics in the years that followed.

However, his collision with King Constantine I over whether Greece should enter WWI on the side of the Entente created a harsh political divide between Venizelist liberals who were pro-Entente, modernizing, and increasingly republican, against a conservative, royalist, neutralist coalition that trusted the crown over parliament and feared the risks of his expansionist gambles. The schism ran so deep that it split the army, the civil service, and Greek families themselves, briefly producing two rival governments in 1916. Though Venizelos secured further territorial gains at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, the catastrophic defeat in Asia Minor in 1922 discredited his grand ambitions and reshuffled the blame between the two camps, leaving a

[38] *Venturas, Lina. "Multi-Actor Synergies, Sovereignty, and Refugee Resettlement in Interwar Greece." Journal of Modern Greek Studies (BALTIMORE) 40, No. 2 (2022): 299–317. Https://Doi.Org/10.1353/Mgs.2022.0023.* 308.

legacy of instability, coups, and divided political culture. [39]Venizelos briefly held power in 1924, and then was head of parliament again from 1928 to 1932.[40]

The reason that so many refugees were Venizelist whereas so many peasants were not lies in the founding of the Refugee Settlement Commission. The Commission was set up as an independent agency outside Greek government control for several reasons. British and League officials wanted to ensure loan money wouldn't be spent on the military, and they wanted to maintain oversight over how the refugee resettlement funds were used. They also saw the Commission as a way to stabilize Greece's borders in a volatile post-war Europe.

The Venizelist politicians who agreed to these terms did so partly out of necessity — they desperately needed the funds and valued League membership for Greece's diplomatic standing. But there was also a shrewd political calculation at work. By outsourcing controversial decisions about land redistribution to a neutral international body, they could deflect domestic opposition while still taking credit for the benefits delivered to refugees.. Handing the Commission broad powers was therefore not just administratively convenient; it may have been a deliberate strategy to push through measures that would swell the Venizelist voter base while shielding the government from the political fallout.[41]

The political allegiance of refugees to Venizelos, and the hostility of native Greeks toward both, reveals something the Commission's reports were careful to obscure: the refugees were not being absorbed into a unified Greek nation because no such unified nation existed. The

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[39] *Dakin, Douglas. The Unification of Greece, 1770-1923. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972.* 201-221.
[40] *Mavrogordatos, George Th. Stillborn Republic: Social Coalitions and Party Strategies in Greece, 1922–1936. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.*
[41] *Venturas, Lina. "Multi-Actor Synergies, Sovereignty, and Refugee Resettlement in Interwar Greece." Journal of Modern Greek Studies (BALTIMORE) 40, No. 2 (2022): 299–317. Https://Doi.Org/10.1353/Mgs.2022.0023.*308.

population exchange had been justified to the world, and to Greece itself, on the premise that it would consolidate a coherent national identity. What it produced instead was a society more internally fractured than before, in which refugees and native Greeks were not two groups converging toward a shared identity but two distinct political communities with opposing interests, opposing memories, and opposing visions of what Greece was supposed to be. The refugees voted as a bloc for the politician who had championed the war that displaced them, while the native Greeks who were supposed to welcome them voted against that same politician with equal fervor. The homogeneity the Treaty had promised was demographic, not cultural, and the difference between the two turned out to matter enormously. However, the resurgence of Venizelos' popularity post-treaty and the conflict that followed should not simplify the narrative to say that native Greeks always directed their discontent towards the refugees and the Venizelist movement, and that the movement was responsible for economic strife.

For most of the period between 1922 and 1936, native Greek peasants tended to vote for mainstream bourgeois parties rather than left-wing ones, despite some pockets of communist support and the brief rise of the Agrarian Party in the late 1920s. A clear example is the currant growers of the Peloponnese, who voted heavily Anti-Venizelist, especially in 1932 and 1933. Yet just months after helping vote the People's Party into power in 1933 and ousting Venizelos, those same Peloponnesian peasants were willing to take up arms against the government they had just elected. Contemporary observers found this startling; one newspaper noted the irony that the heart of the anti-government revolt was Messinia, the most staunchly Anti-Venizelist region in

the country. This doesn't change the fact that Peloponnesian smallholders were reliable Anti-Venizelist voters but shows that their discontent extended beyond their vote.[42]

The effectiveness of the Commission's great refugee experiment cannot be accurately and properly judged without considering the long-term settlement of urban refugees. Although more refugees settled in Northern rural settlements, this should not discount the ignorance displayed by Morgenthau and the Commission towards urban refugees. Urban refugees could not commit to the same productivity the commission emphasized because the Commission simply did not give them the land or resources to do so. Morgenthau himself noted that "no portion of this fund is to be used for relief work of any kind" and that all funds should be put towards "productive labor" "either upon the land or otherwise in Greece."[43]

The urban neglect that came from this outlook meant that many refugees lived in camps into the 1950s, and that urban refugee neighborhoods felt the impacts of forced displacement for decades.[44]Anthropologist Renee Hirschon began studying urban refugee neighborhoods in 1970 to understand the extent to which economic and cultural assimilation had been achieved. Her study was based on seventeen months of fieldwork in the early 1970s, centered on Kokkinia, one of the largest refugee districts established near Piraeus in 1923. By 1971 its municipal area held around 86,000 people. Most of the detailed observation took place in Yerania, a district within Kokkinia where the Hirschon lived.

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[42] *Seferiades, Seraphim. "Small Rural Ownership, Subsistence Agriculture, and Peasant Protest in Interwar Greece: The Agrarian Question Recast." Journal of Modern Greek Studies (Baltimore, Md) 17, No. 2 (1999): 277–323. Https://Doi.Org/10.1353/Mgs.1999.0034.* 280.

[43] "Kritikos, Georgios. 'The Agricultural Settlement of Refugees: A Source of Productive Work and Stability in Greece, 1923-1930.' Agricultural History 79, No. 3 (Summer, 2005): 321-346. Https://Link.Ezproxy.Neu.Edu/Login?Url=https://Www.Proquest.Com/Scholarly-Journals/Agricultural-Settlement-Refugees-Source/Docview/198066339/Se-2." 326.

[44] *Venturas, Lina. "Multi-Actor Synergies, Sovereignty, and Refugee Resettlement in Interwar Greece." Journal of Modern Greek Studies (BALTIMORE) 40, No. 2 (2022): 299–317. Https://Doi.Org/10.1353/Mgs.2022.0023.* 310.

Houses were well-kept and colorful, and the streets had a lively atmosphere. However, closer inspection revealed serious deprivation: unpaved roads, no central sewage system even by 1983, basement rooms that flooded every winter, and severe overcrowding in homes subdivided among multiple unrelated households. Even into the 1970s, the Greek Red Cross regularly broadcasted messages about family reunification after being separated by the Treaty, and refugee neighborhoods still faced inadequate and underprepared educational facilities. Despite being functionally ignored by their government, residents maintained spotless streets and decorated their flimsy prefabricated homes with pastel paint and potted plants, projecting dignity and order despite chronically inadequate public infrastructure. This careful attention to appearances spoke to a deeper communal pride and sense of identity among people who had arrived as refugees with little and built a functioning neighborhood out of temporary materials and scarce resources..[45]

This is not to say that the Commission made no efforts to equip urban refugees with the tools to create success. Despite limited funds and time, the Commission managed to provide each refugee quarter in the Athens area with basic facilities — dispensaries, schools, creches, and the beginnings of a water supply — by 1926. After 1930, though, progress stalled because of a lack of funding. In places like Kokkinia, where significant investment was still needed to complete basic infrastructure, little more was done, and even the modest facilities that existed began to fall into disrepair.[46]

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[45] *HIRSCHON, RENÉE. Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe: The Social Life of Asia Minor Refugees in Piraeus. 1st Ed. Berghahn Books, 2023. Https://Doi.Org/10.2307/Jj.5501125.* 5-10, 56.
[46] *HIRSCHON, RENÉE. Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe: The Social Life of Asia Minor Refugees in Piraeus. 1st Ed. Berghahn Books, 2023. Https://Doi.Org/10.2307/Jj.5501125.* 41-43.

Knowing this, should we assume that the struggles of refugees were simply bumps in the road on the way to assimilation? At what point should assimilation be judged? Economist Elie Murard found the arrival of the refugees to result in no long-term political fragmentation, found a fifty percent intermarriage rate between descendants of refugees and descendants of non-refugees and that each group of descendants displayed similar trust in Greek institutions as of 2001.[47]

If Murard's claims of complete integration and economic equality hold true, we must consider what occurred in between 1970 and 2001. Arguably, this was the most transformative period of Greece's history, marking Greece's transition to a republic after years of military juntas and political chaos, Greece's admission to the European Union (then the European Commission), and Greece's acceptance into the Eurozone. The 1970s alone catapulted Greece into a new era of modernity, undoubtedly affecting both rural and urban populations.[48] With this newfound modernity, rural populations began to migrate towards cities, breaking down the segregation between rural refugees and native Greeks that had existed village to village.[49] At this point, the Commission had long been dissolved, the population swap becoming distant history. Yet, it was less than a lifetime away. Although refugees could have easily spent half of their lives unintegrated and economically depressed, reports of complete integration by 2001 dismiss this struggle.

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[47] *Murard, Elie. "Long-Term Effects of the 1923 Mass Refugee Inflow on Social Cohesion in Greece." World Development 170 (2023): 106311. Https://Doi.Org/10.1016/j.Worlddev.2023.106311.* 2,9.
[48] *Alogoskoufis, George. "Before and after the Political Transition of 1974: Institutions, Politics, and the Economy of Post-War Greece." Greece@LSE (Blog). London School of Economics, July 3, 2024. Https://Blogs.Lse.Ac.Uk/Greeceatlse/2024/07/03/before-and-after-the-Political-Transition-of-1974-Institutions-Politics-and-the-Economy-of-Post-War-Greece/.*
[49] "Rontos, Kostas, Enrico Maria Mosconi, Mattia Gianvincenzi, Simona Moretti, and Luca Salvati. 2023. 'Toward a Spatially Segregated Urban Growth? Austerity, Poverty, and the Demographic Decline of Metropolitan Greece' Data 8, No. 3: 53. Https://Doi.Org/10.3390/Data8030053." 12-15.

When the Greek Ministry of Social Welfare took over from the RSC in 1930, more than 30,000 urban refugee families still lacked permanent housing. The Greek government made only limited efforts through the 1930s, but nothing close to the scale of what had come before. By 1940 the program was still unfinished, with an estimated 16,000 dwellings still needed. The 1940s made things worse. Famine and mass death during the German Occupation, followed by the Greek Civil War, meant refugee housing needs were almost entirely neglected. After 1950 the problem was officially acknowledged again, and a new housing program launched in 1952, but by then conditions had deteriorated further through war damage, and the crisis had been compounded by new refugees arriving from Balkan countries and villages destroyed in the Civil War. Over 32,000 families were classified as being in critical need. After seven years of the program, around 6,000 of the worst cases had been helped, but nearly 7,000 families in the Athens-Piraeus area alone were still living in temporary prefabricated shelters.

Beyond the housing failure, urban refugees were consistently politically marginalized. Their grievances were ignored by successive governments, and they never managed to organize into an effective pressure group. Even during the relatively active period of 1923–1934, refugee representatives never exceeded 15% of parliament, well below their share of the population, and that figure only fell afterwards. As a community, they remained on the margins of Greek political life for decades.[50]

Morgenthau's report describes a nation that had risen to meet an extraordinary challenge, absorbing nearly a quarter of its population in the span of a few years and emerging, if not prosperous, then at least pointed in the direction of prosperity. It was a story the Western powers

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[50] *HIRSCHON, RENÉE. Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe: The Social Life of Asia Minor Refugees in Piraeus. 1st Ed. Berghahn Books, 2023. Https://Doi.Org/10.2307/Jj.5501125.*43-45, 49.

needed to believe, having designed and endorsed the population exchange that made the challenge necessary in the first place. It was also a story that Greece needed to believe about itself, that the trauma of 1922 had not been a catastrophe but a consolidation, that the loss of Asia Minor had been redeemed by the purification of the homeland that remained.

This story was not simply optimistic but structurally misleading, and that its misleading qualities were not incidental but built into the project from the beginning. The Commission was designed by outside powers to manage a problem that those powers had helped create, staffed by men whose primary obligation was to international creditors and League stability rather than to the refugees themselves. Its mandate was productivity, not welfare. Its measure of success was agricultural output and trade potential, not whether the people it was responsible for had roofs over their heads or enough to eat. When Morgenthau declared victory in 1929, two thirds of the refugees still lacked permanent housing. He mentioned this in passing. He did not dwell on it.

But the Commission's failures were not only administrative. They were also ideological. The entire project of Greek resettlement rested on a premise, that the refugees were coming home, that there existed a Greek nation into which they would naturally be absorbed, that the evidence consistently undermined. The refugees spoke different dialects, came from different social and economic backgrounds, and had no prior relationship with the country or the communities that were supposed to receive them. The refugees who survived and settled did not do so because the people of their new nation embraced them. They did so in spite of the nation's ambivalence, building communities in prefabricated shelters with unpaved roads and no sewage systems, maintaining their own cultural identity precisely because full integration was not, in fact, on offer.

This ambivalence was not accidental either. It was the inheritance of a nation-building project that had always been more aspirational than real. When Greek intellectuals declared independence in 1822, they invoked a European Christian identity that papered over the genuine ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity of the population they claimed to represent. When the Western powers installed a Bavarian king in Athens and set Greece up as a protectorate, they were manufacturing a nation in the image of what they wanted Greece to be, not what it was. The drive for homogeneity, the elimination of Muslim populations, the insistence on Orthodox Christianity as the marker of Greekness, the population exchange itself, was not the culmination of a coherent national identity. It was an attempt to produce one by force, and the tensions that followed the Treaty of Lausanne were the direct expression of how incomplete that attempt remained.

What Murard's 2001 data on intermarriage and institutional trust actually shows, then, is not that the resettlement succeeded, but that Greece eventually changed enough around the resettlement that its original failures became less visible. The transition to a republic after the military junta, EU accession, urbanization, and the general modernization of Greek society in the final decades of the twentieth century did the work that the Commission had claimed credit for doing in the 1920s. The descendants of refugees and the descendants of native Greeks came to share similar levels of institutional trust not because the Refugee Settlement Commission integrated them effectively, but because the country they both lived in had been transformed by forces that had nothing to do with the Commission at all. To credit the Commission for this outcome is to confuse a long-delayed result with its supposed cause.

The consequences of an insistence for an ethnically homogenous nation-state continue to play a role in recent Greek life and politics. Beginning in the 1980s, Greece became a destination

for Albanian immigrants fleeing instability and war in their own country. The Greek government was far from accepting of these migrants, forcing many to enter the country illegally due to hostile immigration policies. Widespread xenophobia against Albanians was also common, as many Greeks felt hostile towards the migrants that in their eyes, had the potential to destroy their ethnic, religious, and cultural homogeneity.[51]

These sentiments have continued into the current Greek and European migration crisis, which began in 2015 with the onslaught of the Syrian Civil War. Still recovering from a massive debt crisis, preexisting xenophobia snowballed amongst the Greek population. Voters quickly replaced the left-leaning SYRIZA party with the New Democracy party, which took harsher anti-migrant stances. Once again, Greek society feared that its Christian and Western homogeneity would be corrupted by an influx of migrants, many of whom did not even plan to stay in Greece.[52]

As Northern European "destination" countries continue to close their borders, Greece, traditionally a "transit" country on the route to more stable economies, has been forced to deal with a new influx of refugees. In doing so, Greek society must also reckon with its place as the ostensible gateway to Western society, both in a figurative and literal sense. Just as Greek borders with the Middle East have made Greece the sacrificial lamb for European preservation of Western society, we must ask ourselves how the historical creation of a homogenous Greece has benefited these same countries. Western creditor countries have enriched themselves from the

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[51] "Danopoulos, Andrew C, and Constantine P Danopoulos. 'Albanian Migration into Greece: The Economic, Sociological, and Security Implications.' Mediterranean Quarterly 15, No. 4 (2004): 100–114. Https://Doi.Org/10.1215/10474552-15-4-100." 101-104.

[52] *Christodoulou, Yannis, Evie Papada, Anna Papoutsi, and Antonis Vradis. 2016. "Crisis or Zemblanity? Viewing the 'Migration Crisis' through a Greek Lens." Mediterranean Politics 21 (2): 321–25. Doi:10.1080/13629395.2016.1145823.* 321-325.

loans the Westernization and modernization processes has required in Greece throughout its history, all of which culminated in the 2010 debt crisis.[53]

None of this diminishes what the refugees themselves built. The communities of Kokkinia and Yerania, the tobacco and silk industries, the networks of mutual aid and cultural memory that sustained displaced people for decades, these were achievements of the refugees, not of the institutions nominally responsible for them. Hirschon's fieldwork captured something that Morgenthau's report didn't: the texture of daily life in a community that had been failed by the state and had organized its own dignity in response. The pastel paint on the prefabricated houses, the spotless streets, the careful maintenance of a neighborhood that the government had effectively abandoned, these were not signs of successful assimilation. They were signs of a community that had learned not to wait for the state to define what belonging meant.

Venezis understood this instinctively. He did not write about Greece. He wrote about Aeolia. The homeland he claimed was not the one the League of Nations had assigned him, but the one he had actually known, a place that existed, by the time he wrote about it, only in memory and in books. The Treaty of Lausanne produced a Greece that was, on paper, more homogenous than it had ever been. What it could not produce was the feeling of home for the people it had moved. That work, where it happened at all, took generations, and it was never finished by the institutions that claimed to have accomplished it in six years.

The story of the Refugee Settlement Commission, then, is not only a story about 1923. It is a story about what happens when the project of building a nation is mistaken for the project of

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[53] *Milonakis, Dimitris, Elina Drakaki, Manolis Manioudis, and Sergios Tzotzes. "Accumulation by Dispossession and Hegemony in Place: The Greek Experience." Capital & Class (London, England) 45, No. 4 (2021): 495–521. Https://Doi.Org/10.1177/0309816820959826.* 514

building a home. The Western powers that designed the population exchange, financed the resettlement, and declared it a success moved on. The refugees did not. They built what they could from what they had, in neighborhoods without sewage systems and on farmland they had never asked for, in a country that had been told it needed them but was not always sure it wanted them. The homogenous Greece that emerged from the Treaty of Lausanne was a Western construction before it was a Greek one, and the costs of maintaining that construction, in loans, in labor, in lives, were borne almost entirely by the people who had the least say in its design. That accounting has never fully been settled. It echoes in the hostility that greeted Albanian migrants in the 1980s, in the xenophobia that surged during the 2015 refugee crisis, and in Greece's ongoing position as the gateway through which Europe's commitment to humanitarian values is tested and, too often, found wanting. The question of who belongs in Greece, and on whose terms, was not resolved by the Treaty of Lausanne. It was only deferred.