

**PERSECUTION, VIOLENCE, AND MEMORY IN THE  
OTTOMAN EMPIRE (1914–1923): REASSESSING THE GREEK  
CASE IN GENOCIDE STUDIES**

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## Abstract:

This dissertation examines the persecution of Greek communities in the Ottoman Empire between 1914 and 1923. It assesses whether these events constitute genocide under established legal and theoretical frameworks, including the UN Genocide Convention and key models in genocide studies such as Stanton's stages of genocide and Jones's analytical approach. The study uses a qualitative methodology combining historical reconstruction with analytical frameworks from genocide studies, drawing on primary testimonies, diplomatic records, and secondary scholarship. The violence and policies directed against Greek populations are analyzed in relation to these frameworks. However, despite substantial historical evidence, this case remains marginalized within genocide studies. This limited recognition reflects historiographical, political, and disciplinary factors rather than evidentiary absence. It situates this marginalization within processes of memory governance, arguing that the politics of historical recognition shape which instances of mass violence are acknowledged, contested, or excluded in academic and public discourse. It also considers how the complexities of twentieth-century Greek history, including wars, political instability, and population exchanges, have shaped public memory.

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# Introduction: Evidence, Classification, and the Persecution of Greek Communities in the Ottoman Empire (1914–1923)

The twentieth century has been defined by episodes of mass violence that have shaped international law and collective memory. Within both academic and public discourse, however, attention has largely concentrated on a limited number of cases that form the core of genocide studies, while other instances of widespread persecution and population destruction have been less extensively analyzed. This uneven attention is not solely due to a lack of historical evidence, but reflects differences in definitional approaches, archival availability, and historiographical priorities (Angelou, 2024, p. 4). As a result, interpretations of mass violence are shaped not only by the events themselves but also by the frameworks through which they are classified and studied.

The persecution of Greek communities in Ottoman Anatolia has often been incorporated into broader accounts of wartime violence or treated in a primarily descriptive manner rather than examined through systematic comparative analysis. Existing scholarship has therefore not consistently evaluated this case against established genocide frameworks, particularly those derived from the United Nations Genocide Convention. This has contributed to its varied classification across the literature as ethnic cleansing, wartime population policy, or genocide, and to its lack of consistent analytical treatment within genocide studies.

This study addresses this gap by evaluating the persecution of Greek communities in Anatolia against established theoretical and legal models of genocide, in order to clarify how the case aligns with or diverges from existing criteria used in the field.

Greek villages and communities in Anatolia had roots tracing back to the Byzantine Empire, forming enduring social, economic, and religious frameworks that persisted into the Ottoman period (Doumanis, 2012, pp. 15–42). Refugees (*πρόσφυγες*) later recalled life in these integrated communities as peaceful coexistence with Muslim neighbors and functioning intercommunal relations (Goalwin, 2018, p. 126). However, the wartime upheavals from 1914–1923 deeply disrupted these established patterns, fundamentally reshaping

inter-community relations (Doumanis, 2012, pp. 131–169; Goalwin, 2018, p. 127).

Contemporary accounts and later historical estimates describe mass deportations, forced labor battalions, and widespread mortality among Anatolian Greeks, with some sources estimating that as many as 1.5 million Greeks were deported and hundreds of thousands perished through starvation, disease, exposure, and violence during the First World War and its aftermath (King, 1922, pp. 436–438). Although this period of widespread instability was both extensive and systematic, the experiences of Greek communities during this time have received limited attention in dominant historiography and international historical discourse (Angelou, 2024, p. 4). This highlights the importance of critically engaging with both the historical evidence and the conceptual frameworks that define mass violence.

This research project examines the persecution of Greek communities in Anatolia between 1914 and 1923 through a dual lens: historical evidence of violence and the theoretical structure used to define and examine mass atrocities. The study combines detailed historical analysis with critical engagement with models of genocide. It seeks to investigate both the historical experiences of these communities while also examining how such events have been conceptualized or overlooked in academic scholarship. In particular, it evaluates whether established definitions of genocide, including the United Nations Genocide Convention (United Nations, 1948), Gregory Stanton’s stages of genocide (Stanton, 1996), and the analytical models outlined by Adam Jones (Jones, 2016), can be applied to the Greek case.

This study is guided by two central research questions. First, to what extent can the persecution of Greek communities in the Ottoman Empire between 1914 and 1923 be understood as genocide under established legal and theoretical frameworks? Second, why has this episode remained marginalized or contested within genocide studies, and what scholarly, conceptual, and historiographical factors have shaped its limited recognition?

Methodologically, this research adopts a qualitative historical-analytical approach grounded in comparative genocide studies. It draws on both primary and secondary sources, including contemporaneous accounts, diplomatic records, refugee testimonies, and established scholarly works. These sources are critically assessed with attention to their provenance, context, and potential biases, particularly where accounts reflect national, political, or diplomatic perspectives. The study applies a comparative framework by systematically evaluating the

historical evidence against key genocide models, including the United Nations Genocide Convention, Stanton's stages of genocide, and Jones's analytical approach. Rather than assuming a predetermined classification, the research assesses how and to what extent the documented events correspond to these criteria across different phases of the period under investigation. In addition, the study engages with historiographical debates and interpretive differences in the literature, particularly those relating to legal classification, archival asymmetries, and memory politics. By combining empirical historical reconstruction with theoretical evaluation, the study aims to provide a structured and critical assessment of this case.

This study is organized into three main chapters. Chapter One examines the conceptual and methodological foundations of the project by analyzing how genocide has been defined in legal, historical, and comparative terms, and by evaluating the strengths and limitations of key frameworks such as the Genocide Convention, Stanton's stages of genocide, and the models proposed by Adam Jones (Jones, 2016, p. 13). Chapter Two applies these frameworks to the persecution of Greek communities in Anatolia between 1914 and 1923, assessing the extent to which the historical evidence aligns with established criteria for genocide. Chapter Three explores questions of historiography and memory, analyzing why this episode has remained contested within genocide studies and examining the political, conceptual, and scholarly factors that have shaped its interpretation. The following literature review situates this study within existing scholarship by examining the main historiographical, legal, and methodological debates surrounding the persecution of Greek communities in Anatolia.

# Literature Review: Greek Communities in Ottoman Anatolia

## Historiographical and Memory Politics

Scholarship on the persecution of Greek communities in Anatolia is shaped by questions of memory, narrative formation, and retrospective interpretation. Historians such as Akis Gavriilidis and Georgios I. Kritikos emphasize that interpretations of these events have been influenced not only by archival evidence but also by later political and cultural frameworks. Gavriilidis argues that the conceptualization of the “Pontic Genocide” reflects processes of retroactive framing, in which contemporary legal and moral categories are applied to earlier historical experiences (Gavriilidis, 2016, pp. 499–502). Similarly, Kritikos highlights the role of diplomatic sources and external observers in shaping historiographical narratives, noting that access to archives and the perspectives of foreign actors have contributed to interpretive inconsistencies (Kritikos, 2021).

Eleni Tseligka situates the destruction of Greek communities within a longer historical trajectory of anti-Christian violence in Anatolia, extending from the nineteenth century into the early twentieth century (Tseligka, 2025, pp. 3–8). While this *longue durée* approach emphasizes continuity and lived experience, it also demonstrates how narrative frameworks influence the interpretation of events, often shaping them to fit modern categories of analysis (Angelou, 2024, p. 4). Together, this body of scholarship shows that memory politics and historiographical traditions play a central role in how the Greek case has been understood, framing it not only as a historical phenomenon but also as a contested narrative.

## Legal Classification Debates

A second major strand of scholarship concerns the applicability of legal and theoretical definitions of genocide to the Greek case. The absence of a universally applied analytical framework has led to divergent interpretations of the same historical events. Gavriilidis (2016, pp. 500–501) notes that although awareness of the destruction of Anatolian Greeks existed

among contemporaries of Raphael Lemkin, it did not significantly inform the drafting of the Genocide Convention. This has contributed to ambiguity in how the Greek case is positioned within genocide studies.

More broadly, scholars debate whether retrospective application of genocide frameworks is methodologically appropriate. Competing interpretations often arise depending on whether emphasis is placed on legal definitions, historical continuity, or political context. While some approaches highlight structural similarities between the Greek case and other instances of mass violence, others caution against applying modern legal categories to events that predate their formal codification. This tension underscores the absence of a consistent comparative framework through which the Greek case has been evaluated across its distinct phases.

## Archival Asymmetries and Source Constraints

The interpretation of events is also shaped by the availability and nature of sources. Kritikos (2021) emphasizes that archival asymmetries, including uneven access to Ottoman, Greek, and foreign diplomatic records, have influenced historiographical conclusions. External archives, particularly those of diplomatic observers, have played a significant role in reconstructing events, but they also reflect the perspectives and priorities of outside actors.

In addition, Taner Akçam demonstrates how wartime documentation and policy shifts provide insight into the mechanisms of persecution, particularly in relation to deportations, population management, and diplomatic constraints (Akçam, 2011, pp. 99–100; Akçam, 2012, pp. 97–113). These sources indicate that Ottoman policies were not static but evolved in response to military and geopolitical conditions. However, differences in source availability and interpretive emphasis contribute to varying reconstructions of the same historical processes.

## National Historiographies and Competing Narratives

The historiography of Greek communities in Anatolia is further complicated by competing national narratives and political interpretations. Llewellyn-Smith (2023) situates the events within broader developments in Greek and Ottoman political history, highlighting how internal divisions, nationalism, and international intervention shaped both contemporary

developments and later interpretations. Similarly, Meichanetsidis (2015, pp. 104–127) situates the persecution of Greek populations alongside that of Armenians and Assyrians, framing it as part of broader patterns of state-directed violence against Christian minorities.

These perspectives are often complemented by empirical accounts of policy implementation and demographic change. For example, Akçam's work documents fluctuations in Ottoman policy toward Greek populations, including temporary diplomatic moderation followed by renewed and intensified deportations (Akçam, 2012, pp. 97–113). When read together, these studies reveal both points of convergence and divergence: while there is general agreement that violence and displacement occurred, interpretations differ regarding causation, intent, and classification.

## Synthesis and Research Gap

Taken together, the literature demonstrates considerable progress in reconstructing the historical context, documenting patterns of violence, and exploring the historiographical and political dimensions of the Greek case. However, these contributions remain fragmented across different analytical approaches and do not consistently converge within a unified comparative framework. Scholars have not yet systematically applied genocide-criteria models across the full temporal and regional scope of the persecution of Greek communities, leaving uncertainty regarding its classification within genocide studies. This study addresses this gap by evaluating the Greek case against established legal and theoretical frameworks, thereby integrating historical evidence with comparative genocide analysis.

Collectively, the historical evidence and scholarly debates reveal how complex and disputed the persecution of Greek communities in Anatolia has been. This study therefore places the Greek case within both empirical and conceptual frameworks, analyzing not only what happened but also how these events have been interpreted, classified, or even neglected. The opening chapter of this study builds on this foundation by critically analyzing theoretical models of genocide. Ranging from the United Nations Convention to Stanton's stages and Jones's frameworks, this allows for an assessment of whether the persecution of Anatolian Greeks between 1914 and 1923 can be understood as genocide in both historical and legal terms.

# Chapter 1: Defining Genocide – From Historical Atrocities to Legal Recognition

Genocide, broadly defined as the deliberate and systematic destruction of ethnic, national, racial, or religious groups, is one of the most pernicious crimes against humanity. Although modern legal frameworks classify genocide as an international crime, the concept itself is a product of historical observation, intellectual analysis, and legal advocacy. Events such as the Armenian genocide during the First World War, the Holocaust under Nazi Germany, and the mass killings under Joseph Stalin and Pol Pot illustrate the recurring themes of mass violence that devastated the twentieth century (Mann 2007, 89–91; Adalian 2022, 70–77). These atrocities have not only exposed the vulnerability of minority populations but also highlighted the inadequacies of international law to respond effectively.

In practice, international responses to such crimes were often delayed and ineffective, with states frequently failing to translate condemnation into effective action. During the Armenian genocide, for example, the Allied powers condemned the massacres yet took no meaningful action to prevent or punish them. While Germany was aligned with the Ottoman authorities and largely ignored appeals from humanitarian observers, Britain, France, and the United States were constrained by wartime priorities and careful political calculations (Power 2013, pp. 4–5, 10). The failure of early international mechanisms highlighted the imperative need for a coherent legal framework that could both define genocide and provide a basis for accountability (Adalian 2022, p. 79).

It was within this context that Raphael Lemkin, a Polish-Jewish legal scholar, emerged as a central figure in conceptualizing genocide as both a legal and moral issue. Alarmed by the systematic targeting of groups during the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust, Lemkin argued that existing laws were insufficient to address crimes aimed at the destruction of entire ethnic groups. He therefore advanced a new legal concept that defined genocide as a distinct international crime. This innovation laid the foundation for its recognition, prosecution, and prevention through coordinated international action (Power 2013, p. 47; Earl 2013, p. 319).

This chapter argues that genocide is best understood as a multi-dimensional concept that combines legal definition, sociological interpretation, and process-based analysis. It traces how the term developed from historical observation into a codified legal category, while also emphasizing the importance of intent, structural conditions, and staged patterns of violence in modern genocide studies. This provides the theoretical and analytical foundation for the dissertation by establishing the criteria through which genocide is defined and understood in academic and legal discourse.

## Raphael Lemkin and the Nuremberg Trials

Lemkin's contributions were crucial in shaping the legal understanding of genocide. He first introduced the term to the international legal community during the Second World War, highlighting the need to recognize the systematic destruction of groups as a distinct crime. His work, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, outlined the deliberate targeting of national, ethnic, racial, or religious groups, emphasizing that existing legal categories failed to capture the scope and methodical nature of these atrocities (Earl 2013, p. 319). Lemkin's understanding of genocide extended beyond physical destruction to include broader forms of cultural and social annihilation. As he argued, genocide constituted “a war not against an army, but against a society,” encompassing not only killing but also persecution based on nationality, religion, or race (Parys, 2015, p. 56).

The Nuremberg trials (1945–1946) provided the first opportunity to test Lemkin's ideas in practice. While the Nuremberg Charter did not formally recognize genocide as a separate crime, the term appeared in indictments against Nazi leaders, with Robert Jackson describing the actions of the SS–Einsatzgruppen as “deliberate and systematic genocide” (Earl 2013, pp. 319–322). However, prosecutors did not use genocide as Lemkin defined it as a distinct legal category encompassing the systematic destruction of a group but instead employed it in a descriptive sense within existing legal frameworks.

This reflected the legal constraints of the period, particularly the principle of *nullum crimen sine lege*, which prevented prosecution for acts not explicitly defined in law at the time of their commission (Ozoráková 2022, p. 286). As a result, prosecutors relied on established

categories such as war crimes and crimes against humanity. Genocide therefore remained a descriptive rather than a prosecutable legal category in the immediate post-Nuremberg period, until its formal codification in the 1948 Genocide Convention.

Following the Nuremberg Trials, Raphael Lemkin continued his efforts to secure the formal recognition of genocide within international law (Earl 2013, p. 321). Drawing on both the inadequacies of Nuremberg and the earlier failure to respond to the Armenian Genocide, he actively lobbied the newly established United Nations to recognize genocide as a distinct international crime. Lemkin's efforts eventually led to the adoption of United Nations General Assembly Resolution 96(I) in 1946, which acknowledged genocide as a crime under international law and initiated the process for the 1948 Genocide Convention (Ozoráková 2022, p. 287). Guided by both a moral imperative and a legal strategy, his vision sought to define genocide, prevent it, and hold perpetrators accountable, ensuring that the lessons of history were embedded in law (Power 2013, p. 47; Earl 2013, p. 321; Adalian 2022, pp. 70–77).

## The Genocide Convention: Codifying a Crime

In the wake of Lemkin's persistent advocacy, and following years of lobbying, debate, and reflection on the failures to prevent atrocities, the international community enshrined genocide as a distinct legal crime through the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (Power 2013, p. 57; Ozoráková 2022, pp. 287–288). Importantly, the Convention emphasized the role of intent, defined as the perpetrator's aim to destroy a protected group, rather than the scale of violence or the methods used. This focus addressed a critical gap in prior legal frameworks, which had often treated mass killings as generic war crimes without recognizing the targeted destruction of a group as a unique legal harm (Ozoráková 2022, p. 292). The Convention also anticipated the need for international cooperation in enforcement. Article 8 empowered states to call upon United Nations organs to intervene in cases of genocide, and Article 9 provided a mechanism for referring disputes concerning state responsibility to the International Court of Justice (Power 2013, pp. 62–63). By codifying these obligations, the Convention established a dual purpose, both to prevent genocide through legal deterrence and monitoring and to punish perpetrators to uphold justice for affected populations.

Critically, the Convention emerged as a direct response to historical atrocities. The Armenian genocide, in particular, served as a cautionary precedent, illustrating the consequences of international inaction (Adalian 2022, p. 79). Power notes that without recognition, condemnation, and legal recourse, mass killings risk becoming normalized or “legitimized” in the eyes of the world, leaving survivors vulnerable and powerless (Power 2013, p. 79).

Through the adoption of the Genocide Convention, the international community codified a principle that was both reactive and preventive. It was reactive in holding perpetrators accountable for acts of mass violence and preventive in signaling that targeting groups for destruction would no longer be tolerated as a permissible state action. As Lilla Ozoráková highlights, the Convention marked the “emancipation” of genocide as a distinct crime, establishing the basis of modern international criminal law while providing a framework that still shapes the work of tribunals and prosecutions today (Ozoráková 2022, p. 288; Power 2013, pp. 62–63).

## Theoretical Approaches to Ethnicity and Group Identity

A significant obstacle in defining genocide lies in understanding what constitutes the “group” targeted for destruction. Sociological scholarship challenges the assumption that such groups are fixed or clearly bounded. Michael Mann links modern political structures, nationalism, and ethnic conflict to patterns of mass violence, arguing that democracy can coincide with ethnic cleansing where “demos” becomes conflated with “ethnos,” placing minorities at risk (Mann, 2007, pp. 89–90).

Complementing this, Rogers Brubaker argues that ethnicity, race, and nationality are not stable entities but dynamic processes shaped through political and cultural interaction (Brubaker, 2002, p. 167). Genocide therefore emerges not simply from the existence of groups, but from the political construction and mobilization of identities that facilitate exclusion and violence. Brubaker further cautions against “overethnicized” interpretations of conflict, where violence is attributed to inherent ethnic divisions rather than specific political conditions (Brubaker, 2002, p. 168). This perspective highlights the role of political elites and state institutions in shaping group identities and transforming them into targets of violence, demonstrating how genocide can arise even where ethnic divisions were previously fluid or secondary.

Building on sociological perspectives, Gregory Stanton's *Ten Stages of Genocide* provides a predictive and process-oriented framework for understanding mass atrocities. Stanton emphasizes that genocide is not a single event but unfolds in sequential stages: classification, symbolization, discrimination, dehumanization, organization, polarization, preparation, extermination, and finally, denial (Stanton, 1996, 2023). He notes that denial is a continuation of genocide, as perpetrators seek to erase cultural memory and obstruct justice. This staged model enables scholars to analyze both early warning signs and the systematic escalation of violence, highlighting the structural and political mechanisms that allow genocide to occur. By situating historical examples, such as the Armenian genocide or the Holocaust, within these stages, Stanton demonstrates how social, political, and bureaucratic processes converge to produce mass killings. His framework complements the sociological insights of Mann and Brubaker by offering a sequential lens that links group identity construction to concrete stages of violence, rather than treating genocide as an isolated or ahistorical phenomenon.

Adam Jones emphasizes the importance of both historical and comparative perspectives in understanding genocide. He underscores that the 1948 Genocide Convention codified a “detailed and quite technical” legal definition, establishing genocide as a crime under international law whether committed in war or peace, and specifying acts such as killing, causing harm, imposing destructive living conditions, preventing births, and forcibly transferring children (Jones, 2016, p. 13). Beyond this legal framework, Jones advocates for a comparative approach that analyzes multiple cases across time and space to identify patterns, context-specific triggers, and mechanisms of perpetration. He argues that while legal codification provides boundaries for prosecution, a historical-comparative lens enables scholars to understand the social, political, and cultural conditions that enable genocide to occur. Jones' framework therefore integrates legal definition with comparative analysis, positioning genocide as a process that must be understood through both structural conditions and human agency.

## Legal Interpretation and Intent in Genocide

Legal definitions of genocide differ from sociological or historical perspectives by requiring that the act satisfy specific legal criteria, particularly the presence of intent (*dolus specialis*). The Genocide Convention defines genocide as acts committed with the intent to

destroy a protected group, and this requirement distinguishes it from other forms of mass violence such as war crimes or crimes against humanity (Ozoráková, 2022, pp. 286–287; Power, 2013, pp. 62–63). According to Adam Jarvis and Robert Tieger, this emphasis on intent is the defining legal characteristic of genocide (Jarvis & Tieger, 2016, pp. 12–14). Crucially, legal interpretation clarifies that this intent must be directed specifically toward the destruction of the group itself, rather than broader political or strategic objectives (Jarvis & Tieger, 2016, pp. 863–866).

However, proving genocidal intent presents significant challenges. As direct evidence is rarely available, courts often infer intent from patterns of conduct, including the systematic targeting of a group, the scale of violence, and the organized nature of attacks. Jarvis and Tieger further emphasize that legal analysis involves reconstructing the logic behind mass violence rather than relying solely on explicit declarations by perpetrators (Jarvis & Tieger, 2016, pp. 24–26).

As noted earlier, Hilary Earl demonstrates that although the term “genocide” appeared in the Nuremberg proceedings, it was used descriptively rather than as a prosecutable legal category (Earl, 2013, pp. 319–322). This ambiguity continues to shape debates over the classification of historical cases, particularly those considered “lesser-known” genocides. As Jones (2016, pp. 13–15) and Adalian (2022, pp. 70–77) note, differences in documentation, legal interpretation, and political context contribute to their contested recognition. This issue is particularly relevant to the Greek case, where the absence of explicit documentary evidence of intent has contributed to ongoing debate over whether these events meet the legal threshold for genocide.

## Defining Genocide and Establishing Analytical Frameworks

This chapter has explored the multifaceted theoretical frameworks for understanding genocide, moving from the conceptual foundations laid by Lemkin to sociological and legal interpretations. Lemkin's work underlined the systematic nature of group destruction and the necessity of codifying genocide as a distinct crime in international law, highlighting both moral and legal imperatives for intervention (Power, 2013, pp. 57–61; Earl, 2013, pp. 319–322). This conceptualization formed the basis for the Genocide Convention, which established the legal

criteria of protected groups and, crucially, the requirement of intent (*dolus specialis*) for criminal liability (Ozoráková, 2022, pp. 286–287; Power, 2013, pp. 62–63).

At the same time, sociological approaches, particularly those advanced by Michael Mann, frame genocide as a product of modernity, nationalism, and state formation, emphasizing that mass violence emerges from structural and political processes rather than individual pathology (Mann, 2005, pp. 5–6, 89–90). When considered alongside legal interpretations, such as those discussed by Jarvis and Tieger (2016, pp. 863–870), this highlights the gap between sociological explanations of mass violence and the legal requirement to prove specific intent.

These frameworks are essential to this analysis because they provide the analytical tools through which the persecution of Greek communities in the Ottoman Empire and subsequent Turkish nationalist period will be assessed (Mann, 2005; Stanton, 1996; United Nations, 1948). Notably, Mann’s sociological approach will be used to examine structural conditions, Gregory Stanton’s staged model will be applied to analyze the escalation of violence, and legal interpretations of intent will be used to evaluate whether the Greek case meets the threshold of genocide. Together, these perspectives frame genocide as a conceptual, structural, and legal phenomenon, enabling a more nuanced assessment of the extent to which the Greek case aligns with established models of genocide.

## Chapter 2: The Greek Case (1914–1923): Applying Models of Genocide

This chapter adopts a comparative and analytical approach to assess the extent to which the persecution of Greek communities in the Ottoman Empire between 1914 and 1923 aligns with established models of genocide. Rather than treating genocide as a fixed or universally applicable category, it applies multiple theoretical frameworks introduced in Chapter 1 to evaluate how far the Greek case corresponds to these models.

Sociological approaches, particularly those advanced by Michael Mann (2007), are used to examine the structural conditions that preceded and enabled violence. Mann's emphasis on the relationship between nationalism, state formation, and ethnic exclusion provides a lens through which to interpret the transformation of intercommunal relations in late Ottoman Anatolia, particularly the breakdown of coexistence and the rise of exclusionary political identities.

This is complemented by process-oriented models, most notably Gregory Stanton's "Ten Stages of Genocide" (1996; 2023), which allow the chapter to analyze the progression of violence over time. By identifying stages such as classification, discrimination, and polarization, this framework enables an assessment of whether the persecution of Greek communities followed a broader pattern of escalation rather than occurring as isolated or uncoordinated acts.

At the same time, the chapter engages with legal definitions of genocide, particularly the requirement of specific intent (*dolus specialis*) as outlined in the 1948 Genocide Convention and subsequent jurisprudence (Jarvis & Tieger, 2016). This perspective is used to evaluate whether Ottoman policies can be interpreted as demonstrating an intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a protected group, while also acknowledging the difficulties of applying retrospective legal standards to complex historical events.

Finally, drawing on Adam Jones (2016), the chapter adopts a comparative approach that situates the Greek case within broader patterns of mass violence. This allows for a more flexible evaluation that considers both similarities and divergences, rather than forcing the case into a rigid definitional framework.

Taken together, these approaches provide a framework for assessing not whether the Greek case fits a single model, but the extent to which it aligns with different interpretations of genocide. This enables a more nuanced analysis that highlights both the applicability and the limitations of existing models.

## Historical Context and Intercommunal Coexistence in Ottoman Anatolia

Anatolia, the vast peninsula forming the Asian heartland of the Ottoman Empire which is now known as modern-day Turkey, has played a major role in the political, economic, and cultural life of the eastern Mediterranean (Angelou, 2024, p. 13). Within this multiethnic and multireligious region, Greek Orthodox communities were known within the Ottoman system as *Rums*, a term derived from “Romans,” reflecting their historical identification with the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) world. They were intertwined with Muslim, Armenian, Jewish, and other ethnic groups (Doumanis, 2012, pp. 131—169). This pattern of coexistence is crucial to note, as it demonstrates that such relations in Anatolia were historically structured around pragmatic cooperation rather than inherent conflict. This provides an important baseline against which later processes of fragmentation can be assessed.

Under Ottoman rule, identity was primarily organized along religious rather than national lines, with communities governing themselves through the millet system (Angelou, 2024, p. 11). The millet system allowed non-Muslim communities a degree of autonomy in areas of worship, education, and local governance, while positioning them within a clearly structured imperial hierarchy. Greek communities were therefore neither isolated nor marginal but integrated into the economic and social life of Anatolia through agriculture, trade, craftsmanship, and urban commerce (Angelou, 2024, p. 7; Doumanis, 2012, pp. 43–87). In this sense, the millet system can be understood not only as an administrative arrangement, but as a structure that sustained religious diversity while also positioning communities within a hierarchical order – one that later became vulnerable to nationalist reinterpretation.

Within Anatolia’s towns and villages, intercommunal relations were shaped by everyday interaction. Although Ottoman settlements were often organized into confessional quarters, these divisions were not rigidly separated, and individuals from different communities frequently shared public spaces, fostering routine social contact (Goalwin, 2018, p. 126). Such interactions

extended into informal social practices, including limited participation in each other's festivals and the formation of personal relationships across confessional lines (Doumanis, 2012, pp. 1–14).

Religious interaction further illustrates this dynamic. Refugee testimonies indicate that Muslims sometimes sought assistance from Greek Orthodox clergy, reflecting a pragmatic engagement with religious authority beyond confessional boundaries. Shared sacred sites, such as Christian holy springs (αγιάσματα) in Istanbul, were also frequented by both Muslim and Greek Orthodox worshippers, where individuals participated in rituals side by side (Kitromilides, 2009, pp. 107–108). Greek religious festivals were similarly attended by Muslim neighbors, often as expressions of respect to a particular saint or local custom (Doumanis, 2012, pp. 109–130). Collectively, these examples indicate that coexistence was maintained through sustained proximity, shared spaces, and overlapping social practices, rather than complete cultural separation.

While such patterns of interaction were generally stable, they were not without limits. Broader political developments, particularly the rise of nationalism in the late Ottoman and Cretan contexts, demonstrate how external pressures could disrupt established relations and transform neighborly coexistence into tension or conflict (Angelou, 2024, p. 13). Nevertheless, memories preserved in refugee testimonies complicate purely conflict-based narratives, highlighting that Greek–Turkish relations were often structured around daily cooperation, mutual dependence, and shared social norms.

## The Rise of Nationalism and the Breakdown of Coexistence

During the final years of the Ottoman Empire, Anatolia's long-standing patterns of coexistence were increasingly strained (Kamouzis, 2022, pp. 165–169). Processes of administrative reform and centralization changed the relationship between local communities and the Ottoman state (Doumanis, 2012, pp. 43–87). Gradually, these changes reduced the autonomy that the millet system had historically provided. These foundational changes, though uneven across the empire, created new tensions in social and communal life. Economic and demographic shifts added to this tension (Angelou, 2024, p.11). Urban growth, increased market competition, and the visible economic role of Greek communities occasionally heightened local rivalries and

social tensions (Doumanis, 2012, pp. 43–87). At the same time, nationalist ideologies gained influence across the declining Ottoman Empire.

In January of 1915, the British government proposed favorable territorial gains to Greece in Asia Minor in exchange for joining the Entente powers. This plan was strongly supported by Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos but opposed by King Constantine of Greece. This disagreement created the National Schism (Εθνικός Διχασμός), an intricate political and social divide that formed Greek policy during the First World War and influenced the territorial claims declared by Greece at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 (Llewellyn-Smith, 2023, pp. 273–274). This rise in nationalism increasingly undermined the traditional millet-based system. Greek political ideology, particularly the Megali Idea (Μεγάλη Ιδέα), influenced attitudes within both Greece and Ottoman-Greek communities by promoting the goal of uniting Greek-speaking populations under a single state (Finefrock, 1980, p. D1049; Doumanis, 2012, pp. 43–87; Krzak, 2023, pp. 84–85).

By the centenary of the Greek War of Independence, the Megali Idea had gained further prominence, reflected in nationalist imagery such as patriotic posters in Athens depicting King Constantine as Saint George slaying the Turkish dragon and symbolically reclaiming Constantinople, the former Byzantine capital (Toynbee, 1922, p. 243). At the same time, Greek political actors, supported in part by British interests, increasingly sought to advance territorial ambitions in Asia Minor in anticipation of the weakened Ottoman state (Llewellyn-Smith, 2023, p. 273). Competing nationalist ideologies, including the Megali Idea, reflect a shift toward ethnonational identity that recast certain populations as political and territorial threats.

These developments placed local Greek populations in a complex and precarious position between their village communities, the Ottoman state, and emerging nationalist projects (Krzak, 2023, pp. 84–85). Meanwhile, the Young Turk government implemented policies that disarmed Christian populations and imposed unequal military obligations, contributing to a growing climate of mistrust and vulnerability (Akçam, 2012, p. 22; Angelou, 2024, p. 13; Meichanetsidis, 2015, pp. 106–127). Together, these structural, political, and ideological factors created a fragile social environment in which long-standing intercommunal cohesion persisted but became increasingly susceptible to rupture. By the start of the First World War, Anatolia's multiethnic communities faced rising uncertainty. As Taner Akçam argues, these conditions set the stage for

the tumultuous years of 1914–1923, during which the collapse of coexistence unfolded swiftly and catastrophically (Akçam, 2011, p. 97).

## Escalation of Violence and Early Stages of Persecution

The delicate balance that had sustained intercommunal life in Anatolia began to fracture decisively in the years preceding the First World War (Angelou, 2024, p. 8). According to Nicholas Doumanis (2012, pp. 1–14), the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913 marked a critical turning point, as the erosion of the “spirit of intercommunal living” contributed to a prolonged period of civilian violence that intensified over the following decade.

This pre-war phase is significant because it represents an early stage of escalation, in which intercommunal relations deteriorated alongside growing regional instability. During this period, bandit groups known as *çetes* increasingly targeted civilian populations, carrying out acts of robbery, rape, and killings (Doumanis, 2012, pp. 1–14). The normalization of violence against non-combatants marked a departure from earlier patterns of coexistence and reflects the initial stages identified in process-based models of genocide, particularly the transition from social tension to targeted violence.

In this context, rising nationalism and political fragmentation destabilized existing social structures and increased the vulnerability of civilian populations. Greek communities were particularly placed in a precarious position between local loyalties and emerging nationalist ideologies, contributing to a climate of suspicion and insecurity that preceded the more systematic forms of violence that developed during the First World War.

## From Wartime Pressures to Systematic State Violence

External geopolitical influences further shaped Ottoman policy during this period, particularly through its alliance with the German Empire. Rather than repeating internal ideological developments, this relationship operated primarily at the level of strategic coordination. As Taner Akçam demonstrates, German diplomatic pressure led Ottoman authorities in late 1914 to moderate their treatment of Greek populations in order to maintain Greek neutrality and avoid alienating potential allies (Akçam, 2011, pp. 99–100). This illustrates

how wartime policy toward Greeks was not solely internally driven but also influenced by external geopolitical calculations.

However, this period of restraint was temporary. As wartime pressures intensified and security concerns deepened, Ottoman policy shifted toward more systematic forms of persecution. During the First World War and the subsequent Greco-Turkish War, Greek Orthodox populations were increasingly framed as potential internal threats, leading to widespread deportations, forced relocations, economic dispossession, and violence (Meichanetsidis, 2015, pp. 118–127; Akçam, 2012, pp. 97–113).

These measures reflect a shift from conditional tolerance to organized state-directed coercion, implemented through deportations, coercive labor systems, and administrative controls. As discussed in the introduction, contemporary accounts such as King (1922) situate these policies within broader wartime practices affecting Greek populations, estimating that over 1.5 million Greeks were deported and that hundreds of thousands died as a result of starvation, exposure, disease, and harsh labor (King, 1922, pp. 436–438). As violence escalated, these processes culminated in large-scale acts of destruction against civilian populations, most notably in the 1922 destruction of Smyrna (İzmir), which George Horton described as systematic and state-directed (Horton, 1926, pp. 112–150). The scale and intensity of such events illustrate how earlier structural and political developments translated into explicit acts of mass violence.

As violence escalated, ethnicity and religious affiliation were progressively politicized as key frameworks for interpreting the disintegration of the Ottoman multiethnic order. (Klapisis, 2014, pp. 626-628) During the Balkan Wars, the First World War, and later the Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922), Ottoman Muslims often accused Greek communities of abandoning intercommunal coexistence and of aligning themselves with the empire’s enemies and mainland Greece (Doumanis, 2012, pp. 131–169). However, such accusations were sometimes based on real instances. For example, some Greek units assisted the White Army in Russia during the Bolshevik revolution (Stefanidis, 2020, pp. 101–103). However, the broader effect was the display of collective guilt, whereby entire communities were treated as security threats to the empire regardless of individual actions (Goalwin, 2018, p. 127).

These perceptions were further reinforced by formal state policies implemented by the Young Turk regime well before the outbreak of the First World War (Klapisis, 2014, pp.

626–627). As Vasileios Meichanetsidis documents, between 1909 and 1911 Greek community leaders began to disappear or were found murdered, followed by the systematic disarming of Christian populations and the imposition of forced military service under harsh conditions (Meichanetsidis, 2015, pp. 106–118). These so-called labor battalions often resulted in the permanent disappearance of Greek conscripts (Kritikos, 2021, p. 4275). These measures contributed to an increasingly hostile environment for Greek communities, which was further intensified by the outbreak of the First World War.

Ottoman policy toward Greek populations became more directly shaped by wartime exigencies, including military strategy, security concerns, and diplomatic pressures tied to international alliances (Akçam, 2011, pp. 99–100). Policies initiated prior to the war were expanded during the conflict into systematic and large-scale forms of persecution.

Although deportations of Greeks were temporarily halted for diplomatic reasons, they resumed in 1915 and intensified, accompanied by forced relocations, economic dispossession, Islamization campaigns, and child transfers, all aimed at the long-term transformation of Anatolia's demographic landscape (Meichanetsidis, 2015, pp. 118–127). By this stage, ethnic violence against Greek communities had become systematic, state-directed, and embedded within broader projects of national and social engineering. In May 1919, the Greek Army's landing at Smyrna was authorized with the support of Eleftherios Venizelos and British Prime Minister Lloyd George. Venizelos appears to have viewed the military intervention as the most effective way of protecting the Greek communities on the western Anatolian coast from the threat of violence posed by the Young Turks (Llewellyn-Smith, 2023, p. 275).

Accordingly, the evidence points to a phased escalation of persecution. This continuity raises fundamental questions about understanding, categorizing, and remembering such violence. These developments prompt questions not only about classification but also about the relative marginalization of the Greek case within broader genocide narratives. Addressing these questions demands careful consideration of historical evidence and the frameworks used to define genocide.

## Assessing Alignment with Genocide Models

This chapter has examined the persecution of Greek communities in the Ottoman Empire between 1914 and 1923 through multiple analytical frameworks to assess the extent to which it aligns with models of genocide. The evidence suggests that the violence was not spontaneous, but developed through a combination of structural pressures, nationalist ideologies, and increasingly systematic state policies.

From a sociological perspective, the case reflects patterns identified by Michael Mann (2007), in which processes of nationalism and state formation produce exclusion and targeted violence against minority groups. Similarly, when viewed through Gregory Stanton's staged model (1996), the persecution of Greek communities follows a recognizable trajectory, moving from discrimination and marginalization to organized violence, deportation, and destruction.

However, the application of legal definitions introduces greater ambiguity. While many actions correspond to those outlined in the Genocide Convention, establishing the specific intent required for a definitive legal classification remains contested, particularly in the absence of explicit documentary evidence.

A comparative perspective, as emphasized by Adam Jones, reinforces this mixed position. The Greek case shares key characteristics with recognized genocides, yet differences in documentation, implementation, and international recognition have contributed to its marginalization within genocide studies.

By applying multiple analytical frameworks, this chapter finds that the Greek case aligns strongly with sociological and process-based models of genocide, but more ambiguously with strict legal definitions. This tension highlights the limits of applying universal frameworks to complex historical events and underscores the importance of interpretation in both classification and recognition.

## Chapter 3: From Fragmentation to Recognition: The Politics of Memory after the Asia Minor Catastrophe

The “Asia Minor Catastrophe” (Ασιατική Καταστροφή) of 1922 occupies a central place in modern Greek historical consciousness, functioning both as a foundational national trauma and as a contested site of memory. However, the significance of the catastrophe lies not simply in the violence or displacement itself, but in how its memory has been fragmented, politicized, and unevenly institutionalized over time. The mass displacement of Greek Orthodox populations from Asia Minor and their resettlement in Greece produced deep social and cultural divisions between “*palαιοelladites*” (παλαιοελλαδίτες, “old Greeks”) and *prosfyges* (πρόσφυγες, Asia Minor refugees), reflecting conflicting understandings of homeland, identity, and belonging. As Kamouzis argues, these tensions persisted well into the late interwar period, generating enduring mistrust rooted in divergent social and cultural experiences (Kamouzis, 2022, p. 9). This fractured nature of refugee memory shaped the limits of national cohesion within Greece and influenced which narratives of suffering were publicly legitimized or marginalized. The chapter therefore argues that the uneven recognition of the Asia Minor Catastrophe is best understood not as a result of insufficient historical evidence, but as the result of memory governance: the selective management of remembrance by states, institutions, and political actors in both Greece and Turkey.

### Fragmentation of Memory

The findings suggest that refugee memories of the Asia Minor Catastrophe emerged as internally divided rather than nationally unified, producing long-term social divisions that shaped how loss, displacement, and responsibility were publicly remembered.

Similar dynamics can be observed in other contexts of forced displacement and mass violence, where survivors’ memories are shaped not only by trauma but also by later political and cultural frameworks that determine what may be publicly remembered. Studies of Armenian

displacement and survival show that memory is transmitted through disrupted families, forced assimilation, and silence rather than stable narrative continuity, resulting in incomplete identity formations embedded within everyday life, as noted in *The Armenian Genocide in the Kurdish Novel* (Çelik & Öpengin, 2024, p. 26). This comparison does not imply equivalence between the Armenian and Greek cases but rather highlights shared mechanisms through which post-violence memory becomes fragmented, politicized, and unevenly institutionalized.

This section contends that the trauma of the Asia Minor Catastrophe persisted primarily through disjointed and indirect forms of transmission, shaping how trauma was inherited across generations rather than publicly articulated. As Themistocles Kritikakos shows through interviews with descendants in the Greek diaspora, memories of violence were often conveyed through silence, scattered recollections, and indirect emotional transmission rather than explicit testimony (Kritikakos, 2021, p. 51). Many survivors avoided discussing their experiences openly, while subsequent generations reconstructed family histories retrospectively through scattered recollections, photographs, and inherited narratives (Kritikakos, 2021, p. 52). In this sense, narratives of displacement became embedded in familial identity, with trauma persisting through silence, repression, and intergenerational curiosity as much as spoken remembrance. As one interviewee recalled, family gatherings often centered on relatives lost during the expulsions, though earlier generations referred to the events simply as “the war” rather than genocide, reflecting the lack of a public vocabulary of recognition (Kritikakos, 2021, p. 67). Taken together, these oral histories show that silence functioned not as forgetting but as a mode of memory transmission shaped by fear, stigma, and political marginalization. Trauma endured within family structures even as it remained largely excluded from official narratives of national history.

This contested memory landscape becomes self-reproducing through commemorative practices that privilege particular sites, dates, and victim groups, thereby institutionalizing selective remembrance and constraining broader forms of public recognition. As has been noted, the city of Smyrna (İzmir) functions as a central reference point in Greek narratives of loss and displacement, while in Turkish nationalist discourse it symbolizes the culmination of victory in the War of Independence (Stroebel & Gedgaudaitė, 2022, p. 23). The repetition of such narratives does not simply preserve historical memory but actively reshapes it, enabling

audiences to re-experience the past in emotionally charged and often nationally framed forms that prioritize possibility and interpretation over historical reconstruction (Stroebe & Gedgaudaitė, 2022, p. 23). These processes reflect broader national historiographical constructions in which the Greco-Turkish War and its aftermath are simplified into binary frameworks of Greek and Turkish victimhood, obscuring the complex multi-ethnic social realities of late Ottoman Anatolia (Doumanis, 2012, pp. 131-169). These testimonies demonstrate how memory of displacement persisted within intimate social spaces even when public recognition remained limited or contested.

Within the Greek case, this fractured memory landscape was partially reconfigured during the Greco-Italian War, which provided what Kamouzis describes as an opportunity for symbolic unification between refugee and native populations. Shared participation in wartime mobilization fostered a sense of collective belonging, temporarily reducing the centrality of earlier social divisions. Giorgos Theotokas captured this moment by describing the emergence of a “single tradition” grounded in shared struggle and sacrifice (Theotokas cited in Kamouzis, 2022, p. 9). However, this unity was contingent and politically situated rather than structurally stable. The subsequent outbreak of the Greek Civil War reactivated deep ideological rifts, as communist and anti-communist divisions came to dominate public life and overshadow earlier refugee-native distinctions (Kamouzis, 2022, p. 9).

This process of selective memory construction is not unique to Greece but reflects a broader pattern in modern nation-states, where historical trauma is integrated into national narratives in ways that serve contemporary political needs. In the Turkish context, for example, memory of mass violence has been systematically reframed through securitized narratives that position alternative historical accounts as existential threats to national unity. The Turkish state is constructed as a referent object under threat, while external actors and minority narratives are framed as destabilizing forces allegedly aligned with international audiences (Bezircan-Tanış, 2019, p. 335). By securitizing memory, historical interpretation is rendered as a matter of national security, constraining competing narratives and reinforcing official versions of the past.

This framework is particularly relevant when considering how certain historical events gain or fail to gain international recognition. The politics of genocide recognition are not determined solely by historical evidence, but are deeply embedded in geopolitical interests,

institutional narratives, and state-driven memory regimes. Bezirgan-Taniş highlights how Turkey's engagement with international institutions, particularly the European Union, has intensified these dynamics by linking historical acknowledgment to questions of national legitimacy and security (Bezirgan-Taniş, 2019, pp. 335–336). Within such a framework, recognition itself becomes politicized, while denial is reframed not as a historical position but as a defensive strategy.

Similarly, in the Armenian context, literary and cultural representations reveal how memory is shaped through processes of omission, distortion, and selective narration. As Çelik and Öpengin show, dominant Turkish literary narratives often minimize or relativize violence against Armenians, portraying it as mutual conflict or survival struggle, while marginalizing alternative accounts (Çelik & Öpengin, 2024, p. 8). This illustrates how national memory is constructed not only through official historiography but also through cultural production, which reinforces or challenges dominant historical frameworks.

Introducing comparative cases does not suggest equivalence, but clarifies how fragmented memory and denial operate across post-violence societies. Viewed through this lens, the Greek experience reflects a broader pattern in which trauma is unevenly transmitted and politically constrained rather than collectively resolved. While fragmentation shaped how refugee memory was transmitted domestically, it also had profound consequences for international recognition. The following section examines how political division and commemorative plurality restricted the consolidation of the Greek genocide within global memory frameworks.

## Diaspora Activism and the Politics of Recognition

The memory of the Greek genocide remains deeply contested within Greece and internationally, shaped by uneven commemoration, political division, and competing national narratives. Unlike the Holocaust or Armenian Genocide, remembrance of the persecution of Ottoman Greeks between 1914 and 1923 did not develop into a singular, universally recognized framework. Instead, memory evolved unevenly across regional, political, and diasporic contexts,

structured largely through Pontian, Asia Minor, and Eastern Thracian identities, each developing distinct commemorative traditions and symbolic dates (Kritikakos, 2021, p. 168).

A common counter-argument suggests that the limited recognition of the Greek genocide reflects historical ambiguity rather than political constraint. However, genocide recognition is not determined solely by historical evidence, but by broader struggles over narrative authority, legitimacy, and political memory (Altanian, 2024, p. 25). It depends on whether particular historical events are incorporated into dominant international frameworks of remembrance, while denial operates through the marginalization of competing narratives. In the Greek case, contested regional memory and political division hindered the formation of a unified genocide narrative, contributing to its uneven international recognition despite extensive survivor testimony and diasporic activism.

This multiplicity is evident in the existence of multiple remembrance days commemorating different Greek populations affected by the violence, limiting the development of a unified narrative capable of sustaining international recognition. May 19 became associated primarily with Pontian Greek remembrance, while September 14 commemorated the destruction of Smyrna and April 6 marked the persecution of Greeks in Eastern Thrace (Kritikakos, 2021, p. 169). The lack of a unified commemorative framework weakened efforts to consolidate public memory internationally. As a result, Pontian organizations became the main drivers of genocide recognition campaigns, shaping the public face of Greek genocide discourse while unintentionally reinforcing the marginalization of non-Pontian experiences (Kritikakos, 2021, p. 141).

Political tensions in Greece further complicated recognition efforts. The legacy of the “Megali Idea,” the Anatolian campaign, and the National Schism produced competing interpretations of the events of 1922 (Kritikakos, 2021, pp. 139–140). As a result, the persecution of Ottoman Greeks was often framed as a military defeat and the ‘Asia Minor Catastrophe’ rather than genocide. During the 1990s “memory boom,” debates over trauma and national identity intensified, but disagreement persisted, especially among parts of the Greek left, which viewed genocide discourse as overly nationalistic or reductive (Kritikakos, 2021, p. 140).

Diaspora communities played a central role in preserving and transmitting memory. Oral histories among Greek Australians show that memories of violence survived mainly through

family storytelling, silence, photographs, and intergenerational reconstruction rather than formal institutional remembrance (Kritikakos, 2021, pp. 51–52). Descendants of survivors often reconstructed fractured family histories through personal research and communal practices, demonstrating how collective remembrance persisted across generations despite limited public recognition. Diaspora communities, operating beyond state frameworks, enabled alternative pathways for memory preservation and political mobilization.

Activism, especially in the diaspora, greatly contributed to broader transnational recognition movements. Greek, Armenian, and Assyrian organizations cooperated in advancing a wider “Christian genocide” narrative that framed the persecution of Ottoman Christians as interconnected experiences of systematic violence (Kritikakos, 2021, p. 221). Through shared commemorations and advocacy, these groups sought to situate the Greek case within wider genocide studies discourse and strengthen international recognition efforts. Contemporary diplomatic testimony also supports interpretations of a systematic campaign against Ottoman Greeks. The US ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, Henry Morgenthau, described the persecution of Greeks as closely paralleling that of Armenians, including deportations, labor battalions, forced displacement, and mass death through starvation and violence (Meichanetsidis, 2015, p. 124). Such accounts reinforce comparative genocide frameworks that situate Greek suffering within broader patterns of violence against Ottoman Christian populations.

Concurrently, Turkish state narratives have challenged recognition movements by securitizing alternative accounts of Ottoman violence, framing them as threats to national unity and state legitimacy (Bezirgan-Taniş, 2019, p. 335). Recognition campaigns are often depicted as politically motivated attacks supported by external actors, turning historical interpretation into an issue of national security rather than historical accountability.

The international order established after Lausanne further reinforced this marginalization. The Treaty of Lausanne replaced earlier provisions for accountability and restitution in the Treaty of Sèvres, instead normalizing the demographic and political outcomes of violence and forced displacement in the former Ottoman Empire (Liebisch-Gümüş, 2020, pp. 238–239). By institutionalizing silence over atrocities against Christian populations, it weakened Greek, Armenian, and Assyrian claims for international recognition. The subsequent compulsory population exchange further consolidated this settlement, resulting in the mass uprooting of

approximately two million people and establishing a precedent for state-managed ethnic separation as a mechanism of “peace-making” (Stroebe & Gedgaudaitė, 2022, pp. 9–10). Greece’s weakened post-war position following its defeat in Asia Minor, alongside shifting international alignments in favor of the Kemalist government, further reduced its capacity to contest these outcomes, culminating in the Lausanne settlement and the compulsory population exchange that formalized large-scale displacement (Krzak, 2023, pp. 78–84).

Cultural production also played a role in sustaining denial. Çelik and Öpengin argue that dominant Turkish literary narratives frequently minimize or relativize violence against Christian populations by portraying it as mutual wartime conflict or existential struggle (Çelik & Öpengin, 2024, p. 8). Such representations reproduce official nationalist historiography and reinforce cultures of denial by obscuring unequal violence and state responsibility. This aligns with broader theoretical frameworks of denial and genocide progression, as outlined in earlier chapters, where denial is understood as an active stage in the consolidation of genocidal narratives rather than a passive absence of memory (Altanian, 2024, p. 25; Stanton, 2023; Jones, 2016).

Remembrance of the Greek genocide remains shaped by fragmentation, contested recognition, and political negotiation. While diaspora communities preserved survivors’ memory and advanced recognition campaigns internationally, commemorative practices remain regionally divided and politically contested. The uneven recognition of the Greek genocide reflects not only debates over historical interpretation, but also broader structures of geopolitical power, national identity, and memory governance.

## From Trauma to Usable Past

Collective remembrance of the Asia Minor Catastrophe is shaped not by absence, but by uneven transmission across social, regional, and political contexts, producing multiple and often competing narratives. Rather than a unified field of remembrance, these memories reflect how historical trauma is differentially preserved and institutionalized. Over time, the catastrophe has

been incorporated into political and identity-based projects, where the past is both commemorated and strategically mobilized for present needs.

In the Greek context, refugee suffering was gradually incorporated into national identity as a "usable past." Here, a "usable past" refers to the selective incorporation of trauma into national identity in ways that affirm continuity, cohesion, and legitimacy rather than rupture or accountability. However, the symbolic significance of the Asia Minor experience changed over time, particularly after the military dictatorship, when political liberalization enabled new forms of public commemoration and historiographical engagement (Kamouzis, 2022, p. 11). In this process, trauma was reconfigured as a foundational narrative of national suffering and endurance.

This transformation was not uniform across society but mediated through institutions such as education, commemoration, and cultural production, which shaped how the past was represented and understood (Kamouzis, 2022, pp. 10–11). Refugee narratives were increasingly incorporated into broader national frameworks, gaining visibility while being reframed within a collective historical trajectory. As a result, the Asia Minor Catastrophe shifted from a contested rupture to a stabilized element of national identity (Kritikos, 2021, p. 4273).

A comparable dynamic is evident in diaspora contexts, where memory acquires heightened symbolic and political significance outside state frameworks. While often preserving more explicit accounts of violence and displacement, diaspora memory is also structured through organizations and advocacy networks that standardize and politicize historical narratives over time (Kritikakos, 2021, p. 221). Rather than producing a unified account, these institutional forms shape how memory is sustained, interpreted, and mobilized across generations (Kritikakos, 2021, pp. 51–52).

At the international level, the "usability" of the past is shaped by the frameworks through which historical violence becomes legible within global institutions. Genocide recognition is not determined solely by historical evidence but by the alignment of narratives with established legal and moral categories. As Altanian argues, recognition operates through structures of authority that determine which histories are stabilized in international discourse and which remain marginalized (Altanian, 2024, p. 25). Within this framework, the Asia Minor Catastrophe

remains ambiguous: widely acknowledged as mass violence and displacement, yet unevenly classified as genocide.

This ambiguity reflects a broader tension between lived experience and institutionalized knowledge. Once embedded in national or international frameworks, memory is simplified and codified into legible categories for legal, educational, or diplomatic use. In this process, some aspects of the past are foregrounded while others are marginalized, meaning memory is both preserved and constrained by the structures that formalize it.

The instrumentalization of memory is evident in how historical narratives are mobilized within contemporary political discourse. In both Greek and Turkish contexts, references to the past are invoked less for historical clarification than for present political positioning. In Greece, the Asia Minor experience is framed as a symbol of national endurance and cultural survival, reinforcing narratives of continuity and resilience. In Turkey, competing narratives are securitized, with alternative interpretations of the past often framed as external political interventions rather than legitimate historical inquiry (Bezircan-Taniş, 2019, pp. 335–336).

These dynamics produce not a single dominant narrative, but competing interpretations of the past, shaped by political, cultural, and institutional priorities. Such narratives do not simply reflect historical reality but actively participate in its reconstruction. Memory, therefore, functions not as a static record of events but as a dynamic resource through which collective identities are continually negotiated and redefined.

Ultimately, the Asia Minor Catastrophe demonstrates that the politics of memory extend beyond recognition or denial, involving deeper processes through which societies transform traumatic pasts into narratives of identity, legitimacy, and belonging. Fragmentation, securitization, and selective commemoration transform trauma into a contested resource that continues to shape identity, legitimacy, and recognition in both national and international arenas.

## Conclusion: The Limits of Genocide Classification and the Politics of Memory

This dissertation has examined the persecution of Greek communities in Anatolia between 1914 and 1923 through an integrated historical, legal, sociological, and historiographical framework. It argues that these events cannot be reduced to wartime disorder or spontaneous population displacement, but formed part of a broader pattern of systematic violence accompanying the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of Turkish nationalism (Doumanis, 2012; Meichanetsidis, 2015).

The study situates its analysis within established genocide scholarship, drawing on Lemkin, Mann, Stanton, and Jones, alongside the Genocide Convention. It highlights a persistent tension between sociological approaches, which emphasize processes of exclusion and structural violence, and legal definitions, which require demonstrable specific intent (*dolus specialis*). This tension is central to the contested classification of the Greek case.

The historical evidence reveals a progressive pattern of violence against Ottoman Greek communities, beginning with the erosion of coexistence and intensifying through nationalist mobilization and state-directed coercion, culminating in deportation, forced labor, dispossession, and mass death. In this respect, the case aligns strongly with comparative genocide frameworks, particularly Mann's analysis of exclusionary nationalism and Stanton's staged model of genocide, which together illuminate how intercommunal relations were transformed into targeted destruction through radicalization and state consolidation (Mann, 2005; Stanton, 1996).

However, the legal classification remains more complex. While many documented acts correspond to those prohibited under the Genocide Convention, including forced displacement, destructive conditions of life, and cultural and physical destruction, the requirement of specific intent remains difficult to establish in the absence of explicit documentary orders. This highlights the limitations of strictly legalistic approaches when dealing with fragmented and politically mediated archival records.

Beyond classification debates, the study shows that the marginalization of the Greek case within genocide studies reflects broader historiographical and political dynamics. Competing

national narratives, uneven archival access, fragmented commemorative traditions, and the politicization of Ottoman records have all shaped its recognition. These factors were reinforced by the instability of modern Greek history, including successive wars, occupation, dictatorship, and civil conflict, which limited sustained scholarly engagement with the Asia Minor catastrophe (Kamouzis, 2022). As these events predated the formal articulation of genocide, contemporaneous accounts also relied on alternative vocabularies such as catastrophe, exile, and persecution, contributing to later conceptual fragmentation.

Taken together, the findings position the persecution of Ottoman Greeks within a complex analytical space, structurally consistent with recognized patterns of genocidal violence yet legally and politically contested in its classification.

Further research would benefit from expanded access to comparative archival material, particularly regarding state policy and intent, alongside deeper engagement with transnational memory, survivor testimony, and diaspora advocacy. Such work would further clarify both the evidentiary and interpretive dimensions of this case within genocide studies.

More broadly, this study underscores that genocide is not only a matter of historical violence, but also of the frameworks through which it is defined, recognized, and interpreted. The Greek case in Anatolia demonstrates that classification is shaped as much by political and epistemological conditions as by the events themselves, reinforcing the need for interdisciplinary approaches to contested histories of mass violence.

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