

The Shadow of the Aegean

Memory, Identity and Trauma:

Aftermath of the Population Exchange (1923) between Greece and Turkey

12-14 February 2026

Gießen/GERMANY

Justus Liebig University (JLU)

Graduate Center for the Study of Culture (JLU GCSC)

Gießener Zentrum Östliches Europa (GiZo)

The "**Shadow of the Aegean**" conference, hosted by the Chair of South-Eastern European History Department at Justus Liebig University Gießen and the Graduate Center for the Study of Culture, will explore the ongoing impacts of the **1923 Greek-Turkish Population Exchange**. The event will investigate how the exchange is remembered, forgotten, and passed down through generations. Key topics include **refugee identity, memory dynamics, commemoration and forgetting, and the intergenerational transmission of trauma**. The conference invites interdisciplinary submissions from fields as history, anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies.

The early 20th century witnessed a period of profound instability in Southeastern Europe, characterized by the dissolution of empires and the surge of potent nationalist ideologies. Within this era of significant geopolitical transformation, the 1923 Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey, a direct outcome of the Treaty of Lausanne, remains a watershed event that continues to exert a palpable influence on the relationship between the two nations and neighbouring nations. Not only did the forced displacement of approximately 1.5 million Anatolian Greeks and 500,000 Turkish Muslims from Greek lands, mandated by the Treaty of Lausanne 1923, irrevocably changed the demographics and economics of both countries. It also played strongly into the formation of collective consciousness and **post-migration identities**. The **role of memory** in shaping long-term **cultural identities** of forced migration is crucial, influencing how individuals and communities remember or choose to forget the traumatic experiences.

While the historical aspects of this compulsory population transfer have received considerable scholarly attention, the intricate dimensions of memory, identity formation, and **collective trauma** experienced by those displaced and their descendants have often been relegated to the periphery of academic inquiry. This conference aims to investigate the multi-layered ways in which the exchange is **remembered, forgotten, and transmitted** across generations, focusing on the representation of refugee identity, the complex dynamics of memory, the diverse forms of commemoration, and the transgenerational transmission of trauma and stigma in post-migration societies as Greece and Turkey.

Central to our understanding of post-migration societies is the concept of memory, understood as a social construct and expressed in powerful **narratives**. As many studies have shown, displaced populations carry effective narratives of loss, exile, and a persistent longing for the "lost homeland" (χαμένη πατρίδα (Greek)/kaybedilmiş vatan(Turkish)), narratives that continue to shape identities in both Greece and Turkey. This forced migration often resulted in a sense of "permanent displacement", with nostalgia becoming a defining feature of refugee identity.

In this conference we are thus interested in investigating firstly, the contradictory nature of identity formation in the aftermath of displacement and the complex and often ambivalent relationship with the "refugee" label (πρόσφυγα), and its parallels among Grecophone/Turkophone Greek Muslims in Turkey (mübadils). While memory studies often emphasize remembering, the process of forgetting is equally significant. In both Greece and Turkey, state narratives have often selectively **silenced** or downplayed certain aspects of the population exchange frequently prioritizing narratives of national unity while **marginalizing** the experiences of displaced communities.

Commemoration practices have evolved significantly, ranging from early religious and familial rituals to contemporary museums, literary works, films, and public monuments. Thus, the role of public commemorations in either reinforcing or challenging these dominant narratives and silences is the second key theme for this conference. It is a known fact that nostalgia, historical grievances, and a sense of shared experience continue to shape identity politics across generations in both Greece and Turkey. Hence, our third field of interest is the **transmission of memories** across generations which is crucial to the formation and perpetuation of refugee identity. Descendants inherit memories through **family narratives**, **cultural practices**, and **community traditions** raising complex questions about their own identity construction and negotiation. Finally, we are interested in exploring the questions of how to compare these experiences with other historical instances of forced migration and population transfers and how far interdisciplinary approaches can help in understanding the long-term impact of displacement.

We welcome abstract submissions that engage with the aforementioned themes, as well as other relevant topics. Early career scholars are strongly encouraged to submit abstracts for the conference. The conference will be held in English

-Submission Guidelines

Abstracts should be 250–400 words and include a title, key arguments, and methodology. Include a short bio (150 words) with your submission. Submissions should be sent to migrationsgeschichte@uni-giessen.de by **1 November 2025**. Travel and accommodation costs will be covered by the organizers – on the condition that the conference is funded. Admitted participants will be notified in detail as soon as possible. The results will be circulated on 15 November 2025. Selected papers will be considered for publication in an edited volume planned for **June 2027**. Funding information for flights and accommodation will also be circulated after the submission of abstracts.