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FROM ANATOLIA TO THE NEW WORLD: THE FIRST ANATOLIAN IMMIGRANTS TO AMERICA •

“Green card” – these two magical words have for many come to symbolize the American dream. They have become the key to “making it,” the last step in turning the vast North American continent into one’s new home. Turkish youths share this mindset, for by continually publishing the stories of Turkish artists, physicians, businessmen, engineers, students, stockbrokers and managers who have achieved success, the Turkish press has fired the imaginations and nurtured the desires of its readers to emigrate to America. The number of applicants for Turkey’s share of green cards has followed suit.

A similar phenomenon can be found in earlier centuries, when there was no need to pursue a green card, through an attorney or a lottery. All one needed was to take suitcase in hand, purchase a ticket with one’s measly hard-earned savings, and wait patiently in port for the next steamer bound for the New World. The great majority of the first wave of immigrants from the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic would end up disproving the image of Turks, long portrayed by Western travelers as, lethargic, cheating tricksters, or as scimitar-brandishing, frightful Turks sporting fezzes and curling moustaches. Among those from that generation and its descendants famed for their talent or intellect were Moris Schinasi, a millionaire cigarette manufacturer who funded construction of a children’s hospital in Manisa, the city of his birth, film producer Elia Kazan (Germirli Elia Kazancıoğlu), novelist William Saroyan, whose Armenian parents emigrated from Harput, and popular singers Neil Sedaka and Eydie Gorme, (Gormezano), whose Sephardic families emigrated from İstanbul and Çanakkale respectively.¹ Even less spectacular success, however, was no less publicized in the homeland, where the stories contained in letters from the immigrants were told and retold until they acquired near-legendary status. Today, the dream of most Turkish youth is to reach North American shores by legal or illegal means and become the owner of a gas station or market, if not a low-level director in the banking or financial sectors.

• This article has been translated from Turkish by Paul Bessemer.

¹ Rıfat N. Bali, *Anadolu’dan Yeni Dünya’ya* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004), p. 21 and *Musa’nın Evlatları Cumhuriyet’in Yurttaşları*, (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2001), pp.83-106; Elia Kazan, *A Life* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1988) ; William Saroyan, *The William Saroyan Reader* (New York: Barricade Books, 1994).

Reasons for Going to America

Most important of the general reasons for immigration that also applied in Turkey's case was a vision of America as the land of opportunity. Besides the letters from America sent by friends and relatives, sources promoting this vision included the newspaper advertisements of oceanic transport companies and travel guides. Changes in oceanic transportation itself formed another general reason. The replacement of sailing ships by steamships not only cut the voyage from two months to as little as one week, but it also introduced a definite system of sailing schedules and fees so that emigrants no longer had to wait for a vessel to take on sufficient commercial cargo to afford to sail.²

As for reasons specific to the Ottoman Empire and early Turkish Republic, the main motivation for both Muslim and non-Muslim immigration was that the wages of unskilled workers were roughly five to ten times higher in America than in Turkey. In ten to twenty years, immigrants could accumulate several thousand dollars more while living under the same humble conditions that they had in Turkey. Then they could, and sometimes did, return to Anatolia, and spend the remainder of their lives in comfort. A second shared reason was that both Muslim and non-Muslim males, when called to arms during the empire's later wars, often secretly fled. A third reason, more particular to non-Muslims, was that corruption and favoritism were widespread in the Ottoman Empire but impinged on the minorities most of all. While various reforms meant to instill a spirit of Ottomanism among the minorities elevated their expectations for equal status and treatment to the brink of nationalism and separatism, compulsory military service, which was one of the reforms, actually had the opposite of its intended effect.³

The Sephardic Jewish Immigration

A reason for out-migration specific to Sephardic Jews was the role of merchants who visited international exhibitions to display goods from the Orient, such as carpets, and returned with wondrous tales of new electrical devices, means of transport and other machines available in America.⁴ Shortly afterward, in the first

² John J. Grabowski, "Streets Paved With Gold: Immigration and The Image of America," *Journal of American Studies of Turkey* 9 (1999): 17-32, consulted on <http://www.bilkent.edu.tr/~jast/Number9/Grabowski.html>

³ Leland James Gordon, *American Relations with Turkey, 1830-1930: An Economic Interpretation*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1932), pp.298-302. Marc D. Angel, *La America* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1982), pp.11-12; Joseph M. Papo, *Sephardim in Twentieth Century America* (Los Angeles: Pele Yoetz Books & Judah L. Magnes Museum, 1987), p.21; Michael Molho, "Radicacion de los Exilados de España en Turquía y Emigracion de los Sefardis de Oriente a America," in *Actas del Primer Simposio de Estudios Sefardies* ed. Iacob M. Hassan, pp. 65-72 (Madrid: Instituto Arias Montano, 1970).

⁴ Bali, *Anadolu'dan Yeni Dünya'ya*, pp.57-81; Mair José Benardete, *Hispanic Culture and Character of the Sephardic Jews* (New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1982), p. 161.

years of the twentieth century, thousands of Jewish families were dispersed by disastrous events. On March 13, 1908, for instance, a large fire destroyed much of Hasköy, one of İstanbul's principal Jewish districts.⁵ An earthquake in Thrace on August 6-7, 1912, added to the suffering caused by the recently ended Balkan War.⁶ That war and the Tripolitan War of 1911 already had produced a large migration of displaced Jews and Muslims toward İstanbul and prompted the Jews of Bulgaria to call upon their coreligionists in Europe and America to come to the aid of the 200,000 Jews in Thrace and the Balkan countries. Two years later, the distress created by the Balkan Wars was made nearly unbearable with the outbreak of the First World War.⁷

The sources are not in agreement about the number of Ottoman Jews who immigrated to America. Marc Angel estimates that nearly 30,000 Jews from the Near East arrived between 1890 and 1924. Moreover, unlike the earlier great wave of Eastern European immigration, the bulk of the Ottoman and Near Eastern Jewish immigration took place more than a decade into the twentieth century, as only 2,738 of the 30,000 had reached the North American shore by 1907.⁸ David De Sola Pool, writing at the time of the immigration, provided figures that differ from Angel's.⁹

<u>Year of Immigration</u>	<u>Turkey in Europe</u>	<u>Turkey in Asia</u>
1899-1902	190	297
1903-1905	413	284
1906	252	209
1907	588	330
1908	379	256
1909	346	344
1910	953	435
1911	723	454
1912	760	621
1913	1,319	790
Total Figures (15 years)	5,923	4,020

⁵ Rıfat N. Bali, "Hasköy Yangını (13 Mart, 1908)," *Tarih ve Toplum*, no. 159 (1997): 21-24.

⁶ Kemal Gürülkan, "7.2'lik Marmara Depremi," *Tarih ve Düşünce*, no. 5 (2000): 38-53.

⁷ Angel, *La America*, p. 12; Marc D. Angel, "Notes on the Early History of Seattle's Sephardic Community," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly* 7 (1974): 86-87; Papo, *Sephardim*, p. 21; David De Sola Pool, "The Levantine Jews in the United States," in *The American Jewish Year Book 5674 (October 2, 1913 to September 20, 1914)* ed. Herbert Friedenwald and H. G. Friedman, pp.207-220 (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1913), pp. 209-10 and "The Balkan Wars and the Jews," *The American Jewish Year Book 15 (1913-1914)* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America), pp. 188-195.

⁸ Angel, *La America*, pp. 5-6, 11.

⁹ De Sola Pool, "The Levantine Jews in the United States," p. 208, and "The Immigration of Levantine Jews into the United States," *Jewish Charities* 4 (1914):20; Louis M. Hacker, "The Communal Life of the Sephardic Jews in New York City," *The Jewish Social Service Quarterly* 3 (1926): 32-40.

Louis M. Hacker, on the other hand, claimed in 1926 that some 40,000 Sephardic Jews lived in New York alone. Adding in the 20,000 Sephardic Jews inhabiting other cities in North America at the time would put the total figure at 60,000.¹⁰

In any event, by the early twentieth century New York had a Sephardic Jewish community large enough to support the newspaper *La America*.¹¹ It was especially concerned with Turkish Jews who arrived at Ellis Island without sufficient knowledge of the immigration laws and were forced to remain on the island for months before being sent back. American relatives and friends of the detainees were coming to the island and answering the questions directed by the immigration officials at the newcomers, sometimes making matters worse. Moise Gadol (1874-1941), the owner of *La America*, translated and published the laws pertaining to new immigrants and suggested that relatives and friends leave the task of visiting Ellis Island to the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS). The representatives of HIAS spoke Yiddish, however, which left them unprepared to help their Sephardic coreligionists, who did not. The Sephardic immigrants also did not bear names familiar to Eastern European Jewry and in appearance resembled Turks, Greeks or Italians far more than the Jews with whom the HIAS representatives had had experience. Often the HIAS agents did not even recognize them as Jews in need of assistance. At Gadol's urging, in the last months of 1911 HIAS established its Orient Office with Gadol as its first secretary.¹² The following year Albert Amateau of Milas began to work in the office as well.¹³

The Industrial Removal Office, established and supported by the famous philanthropist Baron Samuel De Hirsch, encouraged the new immigrants to move out of the Northeast and settle in cities as diverse as Seattle (Washington), Gary (Indiana), and Cincinnati, Toledo, Columbus and Cleveland (Ohio).¹⁴ English courses were also held for the Sephardic immigrants, but the cultural differences, harsh northern climate and other factors caused some greater difficulties than the language barrier. Cuba and Latin America promised these Jews, the majority of whom spoke the Judeo-Spanish dialect of Ladino, an easier acculturation process and a more amenable climate.¹⁵ In 1919 alone, HIAS sent to Cuba some two hundred Turkish Jews who were having difficulties adapting to life in the United States. Even before the first quota act, curtailing immigration to the United States, went into effect in 1921, ninety percent of the Jews who lived in Cuba in 1918 had come directly from Silivri, Çorlu, Kırklareli and Edirne.¹⁶

Muslims and Jews from Anatolia had no community to welcome and assist

¹⁰ Hacker, "Communal Life," pp.32-40.

¹¹ Angel, *La America*.

¹² Angel, *La America*, pp.13-14.

¹³ Albert J. Amateau, "The 1910 Immigrant from Turkey," *The Turkish Times*, February 1 and 15, 1992.

¹⁴ Angel, *La America*, pp.16

¹⁵ Mark Wischnitzer, *Visas to Freedom* (Cleveland & NY: The World Publishing Company, 1956), pp. 68-69.

¹⁶ Margalit Bejerano, "Sephardic Jews in Cuba," *Judaism* (Winter, 2002), also available at http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0411/is_1_51/ai_85068478

them as their Armenian and Greek contemporaries did. Despite their shared religion, the Ladino-speaking Sephardic immigrants had little possibility of communicating with the largely Ashkenazi Jewish population in the United States. Indeed, the latter sometimes suspected they were actually Muslim Turks who, also being circumcised, were trying to pass themselves off as Jews.¹⁷

Without skills, the great majority of the Sephardic immigrants could find only low-wage, menial labor in bakeries, restaurants and laundries. Others found work as watchmen, guards or ushers at theaters or as coat checkers at hotels, restaurants and nightclubs. Still others sought employment in produce markets, at shoe-shine stands, or in the readymade garment or dry-cell battery industries. Most workers took home a weekly wage of between five and six dollars. Of the 700 workers at the Interstate Electric Battery Company, some 400 were new Sephardic Jewish immigrants who labored 54 hours per week and successfully went on strike for better wages. As for those working in cloak rooms, they would subcontract the right operate such rooms to others and thereby become “employers” themselves.¹⁸

The Armenian Immigration

The massacres of the late nineteenth century and of 1915-1923, shaped the mindset of the Armenian immigrants. To be sure, unlike other immigrants, they had no thought of returning, either for family reasons or for retirement. Before the massacres began, however, four main factors already had led to Armenian out-migration from İstanbul and Asia Minor. First, around the middle of the nineteenth century the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), after failing in the proselytization of Ottoman Muslims, redirected their efforts toward the Ottoman Armenian population. Later in the same century Ottoman-Armenian tensions and clashes arose along with Armenian national and revolutionary movements. The remaining two factors were not unique to the Armenians of the empire, but economic motivations and the desire to evade lengthy and often fatal military service inspired their emigration as well.

American Protestant missionaries began arriving in Anatolia in the late 1820s and opened English-language schools in every city and region in which many Armenians lived. They especially encouraged students to go to America to continue their religious studies in order to return to Anatolia as Protestant pastors. But a number of the Armenian students did not return from America, instead entering the world of commerce. Even the Armenian craftsmen, artisans and other villagers who left for America motivated solely by the better job opportunities it offered came

¹⁷ Rifat N. Bali, *Anadolu'dan Yeni Dünya'ya*, pp. 91-93.

¹⁸ Albert J. Amateau, “The Sephardic Immigrant From Bulgaria: A Personal Profile of Moise Gadol,” *Archives* (Spring/Summer 1990): 59-60; Victor D. Sauna, “A Study of the Adjustment of Sephardi Jews in The New York Metropolitan Area,” *The Jewish Journal of Sociology* 9 (1967): 25-26; Louis M. Hacker, “The Communal Life,” p. 38; Marc D. Angel, *La America*, pp. 139, 142.

from areas where the American missionaries had been very active.¹⁹

Official U.S. figures for 1834-1890 placed the Armenian immigrants within the broader category of immigrants from “Turkey in Europe,” which also included Bulgarian, Greek, Rumelian and Jewish immigrants from the Ottoman Empire. Only in 1869 were the categories of “Turkey in Asia” and “Armenia” created.²⁰ Taking these and other considerations into account, between 1834 and 1915 the numbers of Armenians immigrating from Anatolia to the United States are as follows:

<u>Period</u>	<u>Number of Immigrants</u>
1834 – 1890	1,500
1891 – 1898	12,500
1899 – 1914	51,950
Total Number of Immigrants	65,950

Source: Mirak, *Torn Between Two Lands*, p. 290.

The vanguard who immigrated before 1890 tended to be students, merchants and tradesmen. Only in the late 1880s did villagers and craftsmen began to pull up stakes from the impoverished land and exhausted soil of Harput and its environs--an area replete with missionaries and missionary schools.²¹ By the turn of the century, the largest and most eager groups of Armenians came from the areas of Gaziantep and Merzifon. After Harput, the region of Anatolia with the largest number of Armenian emigrants was the district of Kiğı in Bingöl province, from which about 2,000 Armenians--mostly craftsmen and farmers--would settle in New York, Illinois, Michigan and Rhode Island.²²

Two waves of forced immigration were spurred by persecution and massacres against the Armenian population. The first, during the period 1890-1899, resulted from Sultan Abdulhamid II's deployment of armed irregular Kurdish regiments, or “Hamidiye” to suppress Armenian revolutionary activity in the eastern provinces. The second wave, caused by ongoing massacres, lasted until 1915. Even in the relative lulls between the two, the inability of Armenian merchants to travel safely through Anatolia, along with high taxes and the ever-present fear that new disturbances would erupt, caused Armenians to leave in droves. Of the outbound tickets of Armenians traveling to America between the years 1899 and 1914, a full one-fourth were purchased and sent by relatives in America. But the growth in this trend is more striking: in 1900 the figure was 12 percent; by 1913 it had risen to

¹⁹ Nedim İpek, “Anadolu’da Amerika’ya Ermeni Göçü,” *OTAM Osmanlı Tarihi Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Dergisi*, no.6 (1995): 259-61; Robert Mirak, *Torn Between Two Lands: Armenians in America, 1890 to World War I* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 37-39.

²⁰ Mirak, *Torn Between Two Lands*, pp. 288-89.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 41,49.

²² Mark B. Arslan, “Armenian Immigrants to the USA and Canada from Keghi, Erzeroum, Armenia,” at: <http://www.arslanmb.org/arslanian/KeghiImmigrants.html>.

33 percent.²³

Ottoman officials attempted both to prevent Armenian nationalists and revolutionaries from emigrating and to deny those who slipped out reentry visas, fearing they would bring in weapons.²⁴ These efforts were reinforced by the Ottomans' more general concerns about the decline in population and prestige that ensued from the desire of so many to leave (and subsequently to denounce) the empire and about the loss in tax revenue that this exodus would produce. The Ottoman Foreign Ministry actively intervened with various foreign missions to discourage their countries from accepting Armenian immigrants. In response, a cadre of Armenian intermediaries sprung up to procure Armenians from the eastern provinces, such as Harput, Sivas, Adana and Diyarbakır, legal or illegal passage to the United States.²⁵

The Greek Immigration

Estimates of the numbers of Ottoman and Turkish Greeks who immigrated to North America vary greatly. Although Leland James Gordon placed the total number of Greek immigrants between 1900 and 1923 at 78,262, more recent works have given much higher figures. Stephanos Zotos, for instance, has determined that between 1821 and 1945, some 156,000 Greek immigrants arrived in America from European Turkey, while another 205,474 came from Asiatic Turkey, making a total of 361,474.²⁶ These larger estimates help account for the fact that the Greeks were not forced to deal with the same loneliness and isolation as the Muslim Turkish immigrants. Instead their critical mass apparently provided a support network to assist the adaptation of new arrivals. As did other immigrants from the Ottoman Empire, the Greek immigrants made great efforts to preserve their own culture in their new home. They and their fellow Greeks from Greece introduced Greek cuisine, and they and their fellow Ottoman immigrants of various faiths and cultures introduced the coffeehouse. In their version of these establishments, the Greek immigrants supported Karagöz plays about the Greek War of Independence against the Ottoman Empire and gambled or played backgammon (tavla), a popular pastime among all Anatolian groups.²⁷

The Muslim Turkish Immigration

According to official U.S. statistics on immigration, 22,085 immigrants who arrived between 1900 and 1925 registered as "Turk" on their immigration forms.

²³ Robert Mirak, *Torn Between Two Lands*, pp. 44-58.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

²⁵ İpek, *Anadolu'da Amerika*, pp. 262-64.

²⁶ Gordon, *American Relations with Turkey*, p. 308; Stephanos Zotos, *Hellenic Presence in America* (Wheaton, IL: Pilgrimage, 1976), p. 74.

²⁷ Dimitris Monos and Sandy Stotsky, eds., *The Greek Americans* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1996), pp. 56-62.

The great majority were illiterate and between the ages of 14 and 44, and 20,652, or more than 93 percent, were males. In the words of Frank Ahmed, whose father was a Muslim Turkish immigrant, America was a “far away Christian country” and no one knew what manner of life could be expected for the women there.²⁸

When the Turkish immigrants arrived at Ellis Island, their greatest immediate problem was unfamiliarity with the English language. During those years, the officials responsible for questioning the new immigrants were equally unfamiliar with the Turkish language and often relied on non-Muslim immigrants to communicate with the Turkish arrivals. The Turkish arrivals themselves had no reason to be concerned about passing the medical examination for new immigrants, but they were gravely concerned about the process of accepting/refusing new immigration applicants.²⁹

Once accepted, the Turkish immigrants would board in dormitory-type housing with others from their city or region in the Ottoman Empire, preparing communal meals and otherwise creating their own “communities.” For example, the population of Turkish immigrants in Peabody, Massachusetts, at one time reached 2,000 souls, 101 of them residing in a single house. Peabody’s Walnut Street was replete with coffee houses, and familiar foods were sold at nearby groceries, as often as not owned and operated by immigrants.³⁰

Fights and disputes occasionally did break out between the Turkish and Greek immigrants. Not knowing English put the Turkish immigrants at a disadvantage and compelled them to take more menial, lower-paying jobs. As the majority came from rural settings, they could not immediately find employment in industrial plants whose owners sought workers with specific skills or, at least, a countryman to vouch for their diligence. At best, Turkish workers labored under the most difficult and unhealthy conditions in the tanneries, shoe, purse and other leatherworking factories of Boston, Salem, Peabody, Beverly and Lynn, Massachusetts. At the time, Peabody was the leatherworking capital of America, if not the entire world. There also were communities of Turkish workers in the automobile capital of Detroit, Michigan, and in Worcester, Massachusetts, where there was a large wire-producing industry.³¹

Numbers and Ethnic Distribution of the Muslim and non-Muslim Immigrants

The exact numbers of Muslims and non-Muslims who have emigrated from Anatolia to America since the early nineteenth century remains in dispute and will, therefore, be briefly discussed here. Three scholars, Kemal Karpat, Leland James Gordon and Berrak Kurtuluş, have all arrived at different conclusions. According to

²⁸ Frank Ahmed, *Turks in America, The Ottoman Turk’s Immigrant Experience* (Greenwich, CT: Columbia International, 1993), pp. ix-x, xviii; Barbara Bilg , “Turks,” in *American Immigrant Cultures: Builders of a Nation*, ed. David Levinson and Melvin Ember, pp. 909-915 (New York: Macmillan, 1997).

²⁹ Ahmed, *Turks in America*, p. xxii.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 61, 69-74.

Gordon, in the roughly one hundred years between 1820 and May 19, 1921, when the first quota act effectively put an end to mass immigration, the number of new immigrants claiming to have originated in Turkey is 186,463.³² Kurtuluş puts this figure at 326,437,³³ and Karpat has arrived at the still more generous total of 415,793.³⁴ Consequently, the safest generalization is that somewhere between two and four hundred thousand Ottoman and Turkish citizens arrived in the United States in that time period. Gordon further breaks down to religio-ethnic composition of the arrivals as follows:

<u>Religious-Ethnic Affiliation</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Greek	27
Armenian	18
Jewish	6
Serbian, Bulgarian & Montenegrin	12
Syrian	26
Turkish	5
Other	6

Source : Gordon, *American Relations With Turkey*, p. 305.

Nearly all of the immigrants who ultimately returned to Anatolia were Muslims. One reason was that non-Muslims who left in order to evade military service lost their Ottoman citizenship and, thereby, the chance of resettling in the empire. Another was that Muslim Turks were averse to the thought of being buried in a Christian country or marrying a Christian woman. Viewing the United States as a type of labor camp, they resisted the process of assimilation or Americanization to focus instead on the time they could return home.³⁵ Those Muslim Turks who did not succeed in returning to Anatolia tended to marry Christian women and become fully Americanized.

Life in the New World

Turkish immigrants--whether Muslim or non-Muslim--usually strove to preserve the customs and way of life of the homeland they had left behind. In this regard, the most important of their traditions were those relating to food and coffeehouse culture. For the Ottoman Jews, the coffeehouses and restaurants that

³² Gordon, *American Relations with Turkey*, p. 305.

³³ U.S. Department of Justice, *1987 Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1988), p. 2, quoted in Berrak Kurtuluş, *Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'ne Türk Beyin Göçü* (İstanbul: Alfa Basım Yayın Dağıtım, 1999), p. 52.

³⁴ Kemal H. Karpat, "The Turks in America," *Turcs d'Europe...et d'Ailleurs, Les Annales de L'Autre Islam*, vol.3 ed. T. D. Stephane, (Paris: INALCO-ERISM, 1995), pp. 232-33.

³⁵ Bali, *Anadolu'dan Yeni Dünya'ya*, pp. 348-49.

they operated for their coreligionists became meeting places for the Sephardic immigrant community. There the immigrants could find friends and acquaintances from the old country, news about jobs and rooms to let, and the latest gossip as well as something to eat and a game of backgammon or cards. But the coffeehouses also could provide an all-too-comfortable venue for loafing.³⁶

Many of the non-Muslim groups supported their cultural and community lives by publishing newspapers in their own Ladino, Greek or Armenian languages. Another cultural preservation effort in which Muslim immigrants also shared was the establishment of various associations. While the Muslim Turks established Turkish societies, the non-Muslim communities tended to found separate societies for their cities of origin as did Sephardic Jews from Silivri, Ankara, Çanakkale, Çorlu, İzmir and other cities.³⁷

The great majority of immigrants from Anatolia were smitten with yearning for the lands that they had left. Visiting the Turkish pavilion at the New York World's Fair in 1939, even some non-Muslims who had fled to America in order to avoid military service spoke to Turkish journalists with longing when they remembered Turkey.³⁸ Jewish and Muslim immigrants, in particular, contributed monetary aid to the homeland during the Turkish War of Independence. For instance, the General Secretary of the Turkish Society for the Protection of Orphans, Dr. Fuad Umay Bey, returned from America with considerable sums of money and other material contributions from the two communities. Anatolian Armenians and Greeks, in the wake of the collaboration of the Ottoman Greeks with the invading Greek Forces during the Turkish War of Independence, had little reason to contribute to such campaigns.³⁹

Turkish Immigration to America since the Second World War

When Turkish immigration to the United States revived after the Second World War, the new arrivals either were more highly educated than the earlier immigrants or were members of the skilled trades. In the 1950s, Turkey's youth and professionals who wished to further their education abroad thought only of the United States. Of the thousands of Turkish doctors, engineers and technicians who went to the United States as a result, a considerable number did not return causing a considerable "brain drain" for Turkey.

Biröl Akgün has provided the following figures for Turkish immigration to

³⁶ Angel, *La America*, pp. 20-21.

³⁷ Bali, *Anadolu'dan Yeni Dünya'ya*, pp. 100-101.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 342-48. For a study of Turkey's participation in the 1939 World's Fair, see Nejat Akar, *1939 Newyork Dünya Fuarında Türkiye* (Ankara: self published, 2005).

³⁹ Fuad Umay, *Amerika'da Türkler ve Gördüklerim* [Turks in America, and what I saw] (İstanbul: Vatan Matbaası, 1341) [1925], transcribed and "simplified" into modern Turkish as *Cumhuriyetin Kuruluş Yıllarında Bir Devrimci Doktorun Anıları* [The Recollections of a Revolutionary Doctor During the Years of the Founding of the Republic], transcribed by Cahit Kayra (İstanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2003).

North America in the sixty-odd years after the first quota act:

<u>Period of Time</u>	<u>Number of Immigrants</u>
1921-1940	34,889
1941-1960	4,317
1961-1965	4,330
1966-1975	18,774
1976-1985	20,865

Source : Birol Akgün, “The Turkish Diaspora in The United States and its Role in Promoting Turkish-American Relations,” *Milletlerarası Münasebetler Türk Yıllığı [The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations] Cilt XXXI [2000/2]* (Ankara: Political Science Faculty of Ankara University), p. 103.

Turkish immigration to America was relatively insignificant in the two decades immediately following World War II. The resulting lack of Turkish presence was reflected in the commercial sector at the time,⁴⁰ but this is no longer the case. Today there are extremely successful, even world-renowned Turkish immigrants or their descendants in industry, commerce, public service, art, medicine and engineering. Each has become a role model for Turkish youth, inspiring hopes of realizing the “American dream.” The number of Turks applying for the annual green card lottery continues to snowball, for America retains its image as the land of opportunity.

As far back as the late 1940s, however, when the immigration to America was at low ebb and Melih Gürsoy could find only four Turkish-owned companies in all of the United States,⁴¹ the Turkish newspaper *Hürriyet* offered its readers a series of role models’ life stories that surely helped to keep the American dream alive for Turks. Now these same vignettes provide vivid insights into the experience of immigrants who frequently were overlooked or misperceived by official data gatherers and record keepers.

The Story of Nesim of Hasköy, the Kansas City Simit⁴² Maker⁴³

I worked for five years in the famous bakery in Hasköy. It was a bakery for unleavened bread. Afterward, I worked at pastry bakeries in Tepebaşı and Tarlabası. There I had a [good] friend, Moiz, may he rest in peace....One day, he came to me and said: “I’m going to America. The Jews there are looking for master [baker]s for their unleavened bread ovens. If you want, come as well!” I didn’t go. At that time I was still very young. Moiz went. In the letters that he sent he wrote that his situation [there] was good. The desire [to go to America] began to grow within me. I had a

⁴⁰ Melih Gürsoy, “Amerika’da Türk Müesseseleri,” *İktisadi Yürüyüş* no.171 (4 February 1947), p. 11.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² A light bread ring of raised dough covered in sesame, which is a ubiquitous street snack in Turkey.

⁴³ Hikmet Feridun Es, “Amerikada Türkler,” *Hürriyet*, 21 June 1948.

little money saved, so I decided to “take the leap” and go. That was in 1912! There were several assistance organizations in New York and other ports for the Turkish Jews who came to America. The biggest one was the famous Hebrew Sheltering Aid and Immigrant Society in New York. It was established for Jews from the entire world; there was in this organization someone from every country. Let’s say a steamship carrying Turkish Jews arrived in port. The official in charge of the Turkish Jewry Desk would immediately run down to the port, because he himself would be from Turkey. He would quickly get to know those who came from Turkey and take them all with him. The organization had its own private dormitories and hotels. He would bring them there. He would make sure they got something to eat, something to drink, a place to sleep and he would find them work. The ones who tended to this organization and provided great financial assistance for it were the Jews who had come to America earlier and who had, through its assistance, found work and then grown rich. Nowadays, the organization has shrunk to the point of almost disappearing, because there isn’t any longer a significant [Jewish] immigration.

When we arrived by steamship to New York the Turkish representative of this society came and received us all. We were in an exhausted state, because we had been traveling for days, for weeks in a compartment into which [the sea] water would enter. The bed I slept in that night was so soft I couldn’t believe it, and kept looking at it and running my hands across it in disbelief: Was this actually the place where I was going to sleep?

But the next day I was greeted with disastrous news. Everybody was asked about their profession. I replied “I came to make unleavened bread.” Everybody there said “Unleavened bread is now made by machine. Nothing unleavened is made by hand.” Another line of work could be found for me...one that was very different than the one I knew. Nevertheless, I made a decision. I would go into business for myself.

Those of us who came to America all had a plan: “If I can find a job doing this in America, I’ll certainly grow rich!” we would say. We all believed we would get rich making Turkish food [and selling it], some thought they could [do this by] opening pudding shops, others, making the famous Turkish pickles, halvah, Turkish delight and other such things. I thought this way myself. Each one of us had experience we had learned in Turkey, making something. So I made pickled vegetables and sold them. You know, most pickles in America were sweet pickles. Sour pickles, even pickled cucumbers were very rare. If you saw a man in New York or some other place with a white face wearing a white shirt and holding a mason jar in his hand or pushing around a cart full of İstanbul-type pickles, you would right away talk to him in Turkish: he must be a Turkish Jew. I worked as a pickle seller myself. It didn’t go anywhere. I began to make little halvahs and sell them. That didn’t work either. My wife made milk puddings. I couldn’t sell those either. We heard a story of one fellow who made a lot of money from [making and selling] nougat, so we tried that, too. Still, no luck.

I was at a loss for what to do. I found work at a fruit stand. At that time, my wife was pregnant. Every day she demanded something different. One day she said:

Can't you go get me some tea and a *simit*? Some kashkaval cheese?' Fine, tea and kashkaval I knew where to get...but a *simit*? Where could I find that?

You try explaining this to a pregnant woman; when she says *simit*, nothing else will do!

When I had to tell her the truth, she still didn't relent.

"So, make it at home," she said, "You're a baker, aren't you?"

I told my friend about my plight, and he said to me:

"[Getting] sesame, that's easy. Italian flour you can find at the grocers." So I went and bought it. Without thinking too much, I made some *simits*. And, truth be told, it wasn't half bad! My wife really enjoyed it. We gave some to the landlord. This American woman was beside herself with delight. I brought some to the grocer's where I worked. "Bring more!" he said. At this point we began to make *simits* every other day. The grocer was a German Jew...and he was a cleverer Jew than I was. He said: "Make more than this and let's put them in the shop. We'll sell them and split the profits fifty-fifty." I managed to make 200 *simit* in a day; they were gone before noon. Each one we sold for 20 cents...The money was frightfully good, but we still didn't have a good decent oven. Ultimately, it was my wife who understood just what we had here. She took out a loan from her uncle and we rented an old garage. We worked and turned the place into a bakery. Now we're making *simits* there. In truth, I'm not the one who makes them. My wife learned how to do it really well and she makes a better *simit* than I do.

[Laughing:] This isn't just a *simit*: it's a life preserver!

Although we never got to the point of despair, we suffered through some really hard times. Now, thank God, I'm doing well. I'm not dependent upon anyone else....

[Opening a box in his hands, he hands me a *simit* in the shape of an 'H', and laughingly explains:] This is one of our products. They're known to be very popular at tea parties here. They buy them for birthdays and other holidays and special events. At our place we make *simits* in the shape of 'A's, 'B's and 'C's, in the shape of letters. Because we give them a special shape we can sell them for more. Because these are for high society tea parties....

*The Story of Artin Şamşoyan of Harput*⁴⁴

The name "Şamşoyan Efendi" is a very well-known one among Turkish Armenians. The Şamşoyans have a great many relatives and own a great number of businesses in New York, Boston and Fresno.

When Artin Şamşoyan—who was originally from Harput—came to America, on the island that was reserved for immigrants they wanted him to take off the amulet around his neck. Şamşoyan rebelled: "That's impossible!" he replied, "I'll go back [to Harput if I have to], but I cannot remove this amulet, because if you take this off you'll have to call for the priest and the gravedigger...." At first they thought he was joking, but after a while they realized that the man was deadly serious. If he took off the amulet he really would return. "Fine, O.K.," they said,

⁴⁴ Hikmet Feridun Es, "Ermeni Kâbesinde 40 Gün," *Hürriyet*, 17 May 1948.

“Let the amulet stay where it is...” and they let him be.

Afterward, Artin Şamşoyan embarked on a great number of business endeavors, was caught up in a number of adventures and made a great heap of money; all the while, the amulet was around his neck...He would always have one of his hands in his shirt, fondling it. One time, when Şamşoyan Efendi was [traveling] between New Mexico and California, he was attacked by a bunch of gangsters. He gave them everything he had, his money, his gold watch, bracelets, everything... Şamşoyan Efendi gave them everything without complaint because he feared for his life, but when one of the robbers, seeing the amulet around his neck, reached out his hand for it, the Turkish Armenian said: “Oh no...Not that!” and with those word alone, the man’s courage vanished.... And in fact, they only removed the amulet from the neck of Şamşoyan Efendi after his death. This amulet was one that Potuk Hodja had written for him in Harput and hung around his neck.

Among most of those from Harput, you can find an amulet from Potuk Hodja; all you have to do is mention the name of Potuk Hodja to an Armenian from Harput! “He used to write them on sheepskin!” they’ll tell you, and then they’ll describe Hodja Efendi thus: “He was a very tiny man, diminutive of stature, with very big beak of a nose, tiny little eyes, a pock-marked face and a long beard.... but his power to work miracles was indisputable...”

I don’t think that there’s any place on earth that give some more importance and respect to pilgrims, religious teachers and priests as Fresno. Nobody knows from what village around Harput Potuk Hodja came or when he died, but his name and his reputation have continued on and spread even as far as the middle of California.

The Story of Yordan Lefter of İstanbul⁴⁵

They called me Lefter of İstanbul, but I’m originally from İncesu. My full name is Yordan Lefter. After my third year I grew up in İstanbul. My father was a grocer in Zincirlikuyu. I was his apprentice! At the same time, I went to little Vefa school. I never had the slightest desire to be a grocer. I was going to learn art, no matter what. But my father didn’t really pay attention to what I wanted. In the end, I began to work with a lead repairman. I didn’t make a daily wage. Every day, I would travel by foot from [the old city of] İstanbul to Galata and back again. Because I didn’t have a cent to my name, I would pass the [Galata] Bridge every day by running [away from the guards]. Because I always ran across the bridge, the guards even knew my name. They called me “the slippery customer” and would tease me, saying: “C’mon now, Lefter, you could at least pay the toll once every week.” They were very protective of me. They would notice if I was sick for two or three days and didn’t go to work, which naturally meant that I didn’t cross the bridge—or more correctly, didn’t run across the bridge. After I’d recovered they would chat with me when they saw me again, saying, “Hey, Lefter, where have you

⁴⁵ Hikmet Feridun Es, “Amerikada Türkler,” *Hürriyet*, 30 June 1948.

been? Have you started to fly [instead of run]? Or are you swimming it now?" That's the old people of İstanbul, who were so dear to me, whose humanity I so loved....

I found the Bosphorus ferries here. Actually, I just gave them the name "Bosphorus ferry." They ply the route between Detroit and Canada. I don't know, have you rode on them? They are just like our Bosphorus ferries. Only they've got one more deck. Every week on Sunday morning I say to myself, "C'mon, let's go ride the Bosphorus ferry." [The metal work on these boats (which really do remind one of the Bosphorus ferries) was made by Lefter in his workshop, which is called "Metal Work."]

Because the ferry boats reminded me of those on the Bosphorus, I worked with all my heart and soul to make them beautiful, so that people would [see them and] be amazed. Anyway, to continue my story: The metal work that I did in İstanbul, that they called "lead repair," I used when I began to repair minarets. This work really engaged me. I worked at the top of the domes and minarets of the Fatih, Sultan Selim and Beyazit Mosques. Afterward I went to Bursa. I worked there. I did the repairs on the mosque at the Yıldız Palace myself.

Because I was engaged in working with lead, I used to also make scale model ships for myself. During the repairs on the Yıldız Palace Mosque, I made a scale model of the *Hamidiye*. I even put a little paddle wheel in it. I used to get the permission to float them in the garden pool that was on the grounds at Yıldız. At that time this was still a problem. A few months before going to America, there was a repair job in Galata. I went and made an offer on the job. "Are you European?" they asked. I said that I was a specialist worker. They didn't hire me. This really irked me. What did that mean "Are you European?" I went to another place, but this time I wore a hat. "I'm Hungarian!" I told them. And they hired me. When I go to my work, the hat goes too, but I would take it off when I returned to my neighborhood. I was terribly ashamed of this situation.

One day I ran into Hodja İhsan, someone with whom I shared very warm relations. But I was wearing a hat! "What's that, Lefter?" he asked. I told him. I complained about the situation in the country at that time. The next day I saw a steamship in the port. I suddenly made the decision to go onto the ship. There wasn't anyone on board....I shouted, and finally a sailor appeared. I asked him where the ship was going. "To America!" he replied. I quickly arrived at a second decision: I was going sail on this ship! I quickly ran to Hadji Efendi. I told him [of my plans] and borrowed five gold pieces from him. Apart from that, I also had a few kurush to my name. Then, embarking on the ship I arrived here. It was a steamship called *Themistocles*. From İstanbul we managed to arrive in New York in just 36 days. Naturally, I didn't do any repair work on minarets here, but my skills nevertheless benefited me greatly in my work. In matters of metal working, I can rely on my own skills, Thank God!

[I was] at a restaurant one night; those there didn't know that I was a Turk, but some of the patrons in one corner began singing Turkish songs. I was drinking beer, and my mood grew heightened to the point that I couldn't contain myself. I began reciting a ghazal...After that, I began to sing. How astonished they were! Hey,

now...at night my mood became so expansive, I bounded out into the street. I had to tell someone about how I felt at all costs. I told my story at length to the policemen that were on the night shift. They sympathized with me and said: "Don't worry...One day you'll go back and see [İstanbul] again."

God willing. My first task when that time comes will be to go to the bridge where I always ran without paying the toll....After that, I will go drink some boza.

The Story of Fazıl İsmail of Salonica, or Fred Martin of Los Angeles ⁴⁶

I began work without five cents to my name. I studied at the Law School in Salonica. That was a whole 42 years ago...On one hand I was going to go into banking. The thought of going to America had never even crossed my mind. But I saw my three friends; Asım, Rıza, and Aziz were always whispering with one another and secretly making plans. One day I accidentally discovered from a travel agent that they were preoccupied with taking the necessary steps to run away to America. So this was the secret plan that they were keeping from me! I took it very hard. What was there about it that they should have to hide it from me? On that very day I decided to go into action. I made a decision: I was going to join them on that very same steamship.

Without informing anyone, I secretly took out a passport and purchased a ticket. And in fact, when I appeared before them on that boat they would nearly drop dead from surprise. So my coming to America really was entirely spontaneous and sudden. Luckily, I knew some of the language already. The ship was actually full of Albanians who were fleeing for political reasons. None of them knew a word of English. There were many issues between them and the ship's administration. Their operations weren't very orderly. Because I knew Albanian I began to act as a translator for them and as the journey progressed I began to earn a little money by informally arranging their affairs. My first action upon arriving in New York—in other words, 42 years ago—was finding a Jew[-ish employer] and learning to be a tinsmith. I made things out of tin on a big machine. Within one week I was the boss. But over time it began to bother me that I was working for another person. Then I began to work as a street vendor, and as a peddler. In my street vending I had straw hats, socks and handkerchiefs.

At that time the New York police gave no respite to peddlers! Among them there was a big, strapping Irish policeman who would constantly harass me. There was one corner of Elm Street that was always busy! But this man didn't allow me to even stand there...God knows just how much trouble he would give me. Every day he would look for me and spy me from far away. Then we would begin a game of cat and mouse. And wouldn't you know it? I didn't know the language very well, because I would always hang around with others from my country. We only spoke Turkish. I finally decided: I was going to get away from my friends. And if nothing else, I would at least learn English well enough to be able to explain my situation to those police officers that chased me around all the time. With this decision in mind,

⁴⁶ Hikmet Feridun Es, "Amerika'da Türkler", *Hürriyet*, 15 June 1948.

I began searching for a new room for myself, one where I could live in an American household. At the places I went [to look], more than the room itself, I was on the lookout for whether or not the people there spoke fine English or not.

Finally I found a place that I liked a great deal. I gave [the owner] the money in order to hold it [for me]. That evening I moved my things over. It was very close to that corner of Elm Street, to the place where I did my business. The next morning I took my streetcart and left my room. I walked down the whole hall [of the building in which my room was located]. As I was doing so, the door of one of the other rooms opened, and who should step out before me but that big, burly horrible police officer, with his hat and uniform on and his nightstick in his hand. It seems that our two rooms were adjacent to one another. When he saw me he was as surprised as I was. He looked at my face and at the cart [full of merchandise I was pushing] and laughing he asked: “[Going] to the corner of Elm Street, no?”

I later learned that Police Sergeant Tom Caligann was the head of the family in whose house I had rented a room. And I am entirely indebted to this family for the flawless English that I speak today. You couldn’t even learn such good English in school...Although it’s true, they taught me as if they were training a dog. Sometimes I would get so angry that I would storm out of the house. But it had to be done, so the first day that I moved in I told them: “Do whatever you need to, but teach me this English!”

And they answered: “We’ll teach you English, just you wait!” Even if they understood exactly what I wanted, whether it was a glass, a plate or something else, if I didn’t say it in English they wouldn’t move a muscle. If they grew angry, they would toss around the thing I wanted but couldn’t name, saying “Let’s see you say what it’s called in English...”

Additionally, the landlord gave me permission [to work] that busy corner of Elm Street without a permit. I set up my stand the way I wanted and did fantastic business. But I didn’t stay there long. I went to San Francisco. There I took the job of cleaning the windows of an enormous factory that took up 12 straight blocks. They paid rather well....After that, together with a friend I opened up the famous Cairo Coffee House in San Francisco. Our objective was to attract all the Turks and Egyptians there. We had Turkish-style music. The Turks even made raki there for the first time. The Americans also came there. But during this period the 1915 Pacific-Panama Exhibition was held. I went [to Panama], swept up with the dream of getting rich there. In the end I returned to America from that place that I thought would make me rich without a cent to my name...

Now I am stinking rich, but this money didn’t come to me easy. When I was penniless I even worked waiting tables. In the middle of the place where I waited tables was an open area where they sold ice cream. And all of the people who came there were rich. I earned a great deal of money, but I developed a frightful rheumatism in my feet. I left that job, and finally I opened a clothes laundering plant. I also sold real estate on the side. And the truth is, now I am better off than I ever wanted to be!

Independent Researcher