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Giorgchos Tsimouris

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Giorgchos Tsimouris

Gökseada has been in the process of changing since 1964. New villages, new establishments and of course a new but developing community of islanders can be observed there¹.

History matters

- 1 Gökseada (Imvros)², located at the borderline between Turkey and Greece at the North Aegean Sea, represents conspicuously the turbulent relation of the two nation-states throughout the 20th century. It also reflects the antagonistic formation of nations in South Balkans and the lack of correspondence between state territorial borders and the cultural identities of the people defined by those borders. Moreover, the particular history of this community illuminates the shifting and at times ambivalent manner in which people subscribe to a particular national identity. It further reminds us of the durability of certain pre-national cultural markers long after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of nation-states in the area.
- 2 Most importantly, the Greek inhabitants of Gökseada exemplify, in a tragic way, the fate of “minor” nationals, which have been treated as threatening anomalies to the homogenization and the purity of the host nation-state. As I shall explain later, this community of Greeks beyond the national territory may be seen as a “trapped minority”³—trapped between an oppressive host-state which grudgingly offered them citizenship, and an unfriendly Greek state which, despite a nationalistic rhetoric of inclusiveness, only reluctantly incorporated them in the national brotherhood.
- 3 Gökseada (Imvros), was annexed for the first time in Modern Greece in November 1912 during the Balkan Wars, after successful operations of the Greek Navy in the North Aegean sea. The Serbes Treaty (1920, Article 84) ratified this *de facto* annexation. However, the defeat of Greece in the war of 1922 by Turkey brought up anew issues

surrounding status of the islands Gökseada and Bozcaada⁴. In the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) that followed, Gökseada was ceded to Turkey with a peculiar administrative status. Turkey introduced a special self-governing status for the large community of about 8 000 Christian Orthodox, self-identified as Greeks or Romii, who remained on the island⁵. This arrangement for the island provoked a stubborn reaction from the local Greek community which complained both to the Greek government and to the Western Powers⁶. The Greek community's protest brought no intervention, and thus many among them, fearful of their future, decided to depart. However, local Greek authorities hindered their departure.

- 4 In the decades that followed, Greco-Turkish relations seem to have had a crucial impact upon the lives of this community of Greeks. Oral narratives and written records indicate that for the Greeks of Imvros the history of the island can be divided roughly into two major periods. The first extends from the Treaty of Lausanne until 1963 and the second from 1963 until today. The first period may be seen as a period of relatively peaceful coexistence between the 8 000 Romii (Greeks) and the roughly 300 Moslems, who were mostly representatives of the Turkish administration. Although written records refer to specific acts of discrimination which took place in that period, such as the expropriation of part of Church's property, the settlement of the first immigrants from mainland Turkey and the exile of both Metropolitan and local authorities of Romii in Asia Minor, these are not mentioned in oral narratives.
- 5 Possibly, these events are heavily overshadowed by what followed. The first major disquieting signs appeared in 1963, a year of extreme political tension in Cyprus. From 1963 onwards, the Greeks of Imvros were subjected to intense and systematic discriminatory measures by the Turkish authorities. These measures included the closure of their schools in 1964, the progressive confiscation of the largest⁷ and most fertile part of their farmland during the 60s and the 70s by the state, and the establishment of "open prisons" for penal criminals in the early 70s. Turkish authorities classified the island as a "supervised zone". This meant that one needed a admission permit by the Turkish authorities to visit the island.
- 6 Due to these intense and continuous pressures, less than three hundred elderly Greeks remain on the island today. Imvrii believe that these discriminatory measures were part of the long-term Turkish political project known as *eritme programi* (project of dissolution). They believe that the final goal of this project was their complete persecution from the island.
- 7 The closure of the Greek schools on 1964 forced people, especially those having children at school age, to move either to Istanbul or to Greece or even abroad. Simultaneously, the deprivation of their farmland made Imvrii realize that it would be hard for them to survive. Oral accounts report many incidents of compulsory expropriation of land by the Turkish authorities. Imvrii often resorted to courts in order to get their land back. However, their efforts to win a fair trial were rarely successful: "they got my olive grove in the price of the wood of one olive tree (...). When I made this complaint to the jury he responded that one needs a lot of work in order to sell the wood of one olive tree (...). I said nothing more ... what could I say?" an aged man reported bitterly to me when discussing this issue on Imvros.
- 8 The crisis in Cyprus in 1974 and the invasion of Turkish troops was a turning point in the collective memory of Imvrii. "The situation here changed overnight" several people stressed. "Turkish soldiers invaded our houses terrifying and raping". Several episodes

of rape and murder are reported whenever the issue of Cyprus "to Kypriako" comes up. "Even our Turkish neighbors and friends turned to look at us in a hostile way" oral accounts conclude.

At the same time we were terrorized by the criminals of the open prisons; they invaded our villages stealing our properties, intimidating or even killing us. Here at Aghii Theodori, one of them attacked a woman (...) because she resisted the prisoner murdered her. At night, fear dominated the village (...) we were locked into our homes and we were afraid to exchange visits.

- 9 Such dramatic events prompted many Imvrii to abandon their homeland. The first massive departures from the island occurred after 1964, and were continued throughout the 70s and the 80s. Stories of flight are extended over a period of about 30 years and include a great variety of routes. Some families initially were settled in Istanbul and afterwards emigrated to Greece. Other people were compelled to transfer to a Central-European state in order to get a visa for Greece since they were not allowed to move directly to Greece. Young people left as fugitives to escape military service in the Turkish army. Numerous people left at night in small fishing boats for the nearby islands, Lemnos and Samothraki. Many of these families did not experience violence directly, but because of the climate of fear and insecurity they followed the wave of their fellow villagers.
- 10 Accounts of flight usually conclude with issues surrounding their reaching the final destination that in most cases was Greece. They usually stayed in police stations during the first days after their arrival. Given the absence of any settlement project at a national level, the months that followed usually are remembered as a hard and humiliating period. It was quite common for the newcomers to have arranged individually with relatives or friends their arrival in Greece.
- 11 Members of different generations strongly believe that Greek authorities demonstrated a blatant indifference to their cause both when they were persecuted from homeland and when they were settled in Greece. They complain that they were treated as an unwanted burden during their arrival: state officials, they say, were apathetic regarding the difficulties of their uprooting and rarely, if ever, advocated their concerns to international organizations. They also speak about reports addressed to the Ministry of Foreign affairs, which were swallowed by bureaucracy and never saw the light of the day again.
- 12 Another point of protest against the Greek state are the troubles which most Imvrii encountered in their attempt to get Greek citizenship. State authorities were reluctant to provide them with Greek citizenship, they argue, in order to force them to return to the island and prevent its de-hellenization. Their strong belief that Greece avoided risking a peaceful coexistence with Turkey at their expense may be summarized in the statement attributed to G. Papandreou who was prime-minister of Greece during the 60s: "Why jeopardize our relations with Turkey, only for the sake of a bunch of fishermen?"
- 13 Such stories drive Imvrii to conclude that for a long time their cause has remained unrecognized in the public sphere in the name of larger national strategic interests. This view seems to be justified by the nature of expulsion from homeland: notwithstanding its massive and violent character, it has not been registered as a persecution in the official, national and international records. It is rather a forced displacement carried out in a "peaceful" manner. For Imvrii, Turkish barbarity against

them went hand in hand with Greek indifference over a long period of time. They argue that, "the devastation of the island would have been averted if Greece had acted in time". The belated interest of politicians in their cause, especially nationalist politicians who seize at the opportunity to struggle for the violated rights of Hellenism, does not change their views: "if we hadn't made our cause known on our own initiatives and struggled, Imvros would have been definitely forgotten. Politicians remember us only for their own interests (...), some of them are really dangerous for our purposes", the leaders of Imvrian associations would claim—referring to nationalists.

- 14 Interestingly enough, the view that the Greek state faced with indifference the forced dislocation of Imvrii, is accepted in the public fora of the Greek state. In the summer of 1998, during an official visit to Lemnos⁸ President K. Stefanopoulos apologized publicly for the treatment of Imvrii by the Greek state. Discussing this issue with a young Imvriot I asked him to comment on the declaration of the president. He answered that "if this apology is enough for people like my father who lost everything and were expelled from their own homes, for me it is fine; but I don't think that it is so". Posing the same question to a young woman coming from Imvros she answered, "what has the official state done after this declaration?", and she concluded that "it was just a declaration".

Between Turkish violence and Hellenic indifference: theoretical reflections from the margins of the nation

Every human problem must be considered from the standpoint of time⁹

- 15 Despite the official rhetoric according to which Gökseada (Imvros) is the cradle of Hellenism since time immemorial, state policies and bureaucracies had difficulty "imagining", in Anderson's sense¹⁰, Imvrii as real Greeks. Several hegemonic considerations locate Imvrii at the margins of national purity: first, their long coexistence and close association with a *hostile* national *other*; second, the fact that some of them bear even today Turkish citizenship, since the Greek government was reluctant to provide them with citizenship¹¹. and third, their properties and homes are in Turkish territory. Fluent knowledge of the Turkish language, especially by the first generation members, may also be seen as an odd mark for a real Greek. These obstacles prevented the national imagination from shifting towards full inclusiveness and genuine incorporation. This complete inability of political elites to imagine Imvrii as real Greeks, although not acknowledged publicly, explains partly the profound resentment and revulsion of Imvrii towards official rhetoric and policies.
- 16 It has been noted in anthropology that margins are "sites from which we see the instability of social categories" and "zones of unpredictability at the edges of discursive stability, where contradictory discourses overlap"¹². I deal with Imvrii as a minority trapped between a hostile host-state which reluctantly offered them citizenship, and an indifferent mother nation which relegated them to the *geopolitical margins of national purity*. However, as stated earlier, margins are not only sites of restriction, oppression or assimilation but also creative stages of rearticulation and resignification of those very hegemonic truths and categories, which peripheralize the existence of the group in the national culture.

- 17 Communities constituted by "nationals" beyond the national borders keep us aware that nationalism is developed in discrepant ways among such groups, as a result of their specific situations. They enjoy different conditions of geopolitical and material existence; their relations with "significant national others", are rooted in immediate experience, not state-mediated representation; and their ties to their "own" pedagogical national center are often loose. Communities of "nationals" like Imvrii, dramatically and reluctantly incorporated in the national territory and culture, thus challenge the timeless posture of the nation-state¹³, undermine its public rhetoric and rearticulate boundaries of "we-ness" in unexpected and, for the nation-state, undesirable ways. Most importantly, margins of the national imagination like Imvros push nationalist rhetoric to its limits and show in very sharp and illuminating ways the inconsistency between public statements of inclusion and relevant action towards "minor" groups.
- 18 Theoretical attention to identities articulated in the interstices of a transnational world that celebrates what Homi Bhabha calls "third space"¹⁴, or what Appadurai perceives as "global ethnoscapings"¹⁵ does not fit this case. This theoretical view has a limited value in the South Balkans, a geopolitical area in which, like many other regions of the world¹⁶, options for collective identity have become highly restricted in the public sphere. Not only transnational ethnoscapings but mainly nation-state landscapes matter in the construction of collectivities. While "transnationalism" may have some value for older Imvrii who were left behind, as I will explain later, it would be rather problematic to employ this concept for those who have been incorporated in Greece over the last decades.
- 19 In this regard, oral testimonies of Imvrii are framed and shaped by powerful hegemonic discourses 30 or 40 years after settlement in Greece. This may explain why discrepant or even contradictory discourses arise when they recall their past in their homeland. On the one hand, a sense of betrayal and resentment arises whenever Imvrii deal with their treatment by the Greek state. On the other hand, Turkish people in the island are remembered as quiet, peaceful neighbors and often-good friends while their own misfortunes are attributed to state policies. Nevertheless, often their troubles are recounted in explicitly nationalistic terms: "the Greek state should have done to Moslems of Thrace the same atrocities that the Turks have committed to us (...) while Moslems in Greece have dramatically proliferated, the Hellenism of Turkey has been wiped out". In the same vein, occasionally their forced expulsion is equated with the persecution of Hellenism in its ancestral cradle, Asia Minor.
- 20 Gramsci's concept of "contradictory consciousness" is particularly relevant in our attempt to explore these contradictory aspects of the same testimonies - which cannot be fully accommodated within nationalist discourse and yet cannot be understood by fully rejecting it either. It is more useful, perhaps, than the notion of a "transnational space" formed by Turkish violence and Greek indifference. In the words of Gramsci:
- One might almost say that he has two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness): one that is implicit in his activity [or experience, I may add] (...) and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed¹⁷.
- 21 This interpretive framework will also enable us to understand the discrepancy of views between those Imvrii who left and those who decided to spend the last years of their lives in the homeland. These two groups react differently to the "national narrative" of

the Greek nation, and ethnographic evidence from both indicates also the tensions that each group experience over the idea of "homeland".

August 15 on Imvros

Really, beyond any suggestions and theories, Imvros revives just one period of the year, thanks to the Greeks only. From the end of July to the end of August the immigrants Imvrii from abroad return together with those who live in Greece in order to participate in the festival of Panaghia (Virgin Mary) and at the same time to meet each other ...

They celebrate all together the symbolic return to the land of their ancestors (...) indeed, a return in doses (...) and a huge pilgrimage. (An immigrant)¹⁸.

- 22 Every year, around mid-August, between two and three thousand Imvrii from Greece and the wider diaspora gather on the island to celebrate the Assumption of the Virgin Mary (*to panigyri tis Panaghias*). While this religious festival has always been important for Orthodox Greeks in general, for Imvrii it now has particular significance. The first visits in the island were noted in the late 80s when expatriates first dared to hope that they could return to their homes without facing any trouble from the Turkish authorities. The first visitors were few and returned back to their villages with sentiments of fear and insecurity. The fact that these first returnees did not face any particular difficulties encouraged more people to visit the island. Young people in particular were more enthusiastic about celebrating the annual feast in their ancestral homeland. Progressively, the number of Imvrii who returned on this occasion grew remarkably. The main body of visitors comes from Greece but there are people from all over the world. Visits usually last from one week to one month, and around the feast day on the 15th of August it is hard to find a proper room in which to stay. Moreover, a few old visitors may stay on the island for months, since they alternate their residence between Greece and Turkey. Over the last decade, the festival has crystallized as the major event for the members of this displaced community, and attracted wider national interest: various famous Greek singers have performed on the island on the occasion of the festival.
- 23 Some exiled Imvriotes do not participate in these festivities. Intentional "forgetfulness" is quite common, especially among the elderly. I met people who never returned since they left. One of them told me that he wanted to keep the picture of the homeland as it was before. Another systematically avoids touching any of the many albums of photos that his daughter, an amateur photographer, has shot in Imvros. I often heard people saying on the island that this would be the last trip to the homeland. Nevertheless, the number of visitors on the occasion of the festival is increasing year after year. This is in part a result of the activities of associations of Imvrii in Greece and abroad. A primary goal for some leaders of these associations is to try and get back their properties: encouraging high attendance in the yearly festivals is a way to keep alive the history and the memory of the place and to transmit it to younger Imvriotes. One of the young members of the administrative council of the association of Athens argued that
it will be important if we succeed in making Imvros a living place of memory and a place of pilgrimage for the young generation (...) otherwise we'll start building dead monuments in Greece ossifying our memories (...) who knows (...) there are so many factors beyond our control.

24 In a broader context, Imvrii make clear that for them this occasion is a remarkable and unique opportunity to return back home after a long time and to meet friends and fellow villagers. Indeed, in the course of the last decade or so Imvros has become the main meeting-point for a large number of Imvrii who left as fugitives under the most uncommon conditions. It is also a huge pilgrimage in which religious sentiments are inextricably confused with feelings of homesickness. Literally, *to panigyri* is a ritual of *re-membering* the place and the people, a painful act of putting together of the dismembered community. As a ritual, is a repetitive act that manifests the profound need to reclaim and to look back.

25 The broader political issues of the pilgrimage can be traced in the following interview provided for *Imvros*, the Journal edited by the Association of Imvrii of Athens:

Wherever you look Imvros hurts you

Like "the apostles coming from the ends of the world" we gathered this year again in Imvros, in our Mother Land, coming from the five continents, indeed half way across the world. Young, old, children, everybody reached homeland trying to become familiar with the new order of things. Once you see Imvros, from far off, tears run down from eyes. As the boat approaches the island everything appears different: so familiar and so strange at the same time. There is no obstacle able to stop one from traveling to this blessed and magic Island, nor old age. That's why one encounters here people, marked by hardships and time, and full of the pain and the bitterness of foreign lands (*xenitia*) who, nevertheless, undertake the impossible as they reopen their houses and walk on the same streets where their ancestors walked innumerable times. They undertake the impossible as they enter the same church with a new feeling of piety, as they drink the water of remembrance and breathe the life-giving air. For all of us everything seems inconceivable, unprecedented, unique. Especially for those who are on the wane of their lives and who live every day as if it were their last ...

But we the rest, what we are doing? We run everywhere to touch, to recognize and cling deeply in our hearts everything that belongs to our homeland, whatever it might be.

Unfortunately, whatever we touch we become witnesses of small and big changes. From one end of the island to the other, the activities of the Turks which aim to de-Hellenize the Island intensify, thus multiplying and deepening the island's wounds. Every year the marks become more and profound. Certainly nobody does anything to stop them; neither Greece nor we. We don't know, we don't wish, we can't (...) which one is the answer? All together? In any case one thing is certain: We allow ourselves, even today, to become spectators of our own disaster without being able at all to react effectively. We never managed to become masters of our own fate: neither individually nor collectively. We have never risen to the circumstances. Our acts are convulsive without depth and without perspective. Our efforts aim more to impress rather than to stop the evil. Perhaps we simply can't conceive what is going to occur in the near future, when the end of illusions will come.¹⁹

26 For Imvriotes, as for other diasporas and displaced communities, homeland remains the village and the island of origin lost through violence, rather than the place they settled in Greece or abroad. This is made clear in the emotional description given above. Yet also included are fragments of a generic nationalist discourse, like the rhetoric of Turkish de-Hellenization of the island, alongside criticism of national policy. The juxtaposition of these elements reflect both the influence of state prescriptions for and restraints on the public articulation of collectivity, and the message that participating in a new national community is not enough to accommodate collective experiences of violence and loss.

- 27 In this regard, the passage may be taken as demonstrating a form of the "contradictory consciousness" discussed earlier. The return to Imvros during the festival is seen as a moral, yet extremely painful task for young and old Imvriotes, generating profound feelings of bitterness and repulsion for the current condition of the island. Pessimism and ambivalence pervades their words whenever they discuss the future of their homeland. Many of those who visit the island do not have Turkish citizenship. This implies that they are not entitled to inherit their own homes and properties. Most people believe that very soon, when the elderly die everything will be definitively lost. I met a young man who told me that he prefers to sleep in his car rather than in his house. When I asked him why he gave me the following answer, "I can't bear the condition of the house as it is and I don't want to make any repairs (...) I know that I am going to lose it in a few years time". Although some people have sold their houses or fields and never returned, I met others who are determined not to sell a square meter although they are convinced that they are going to lose their land. For them, not selling is a way to pay tribute to community members who have passed away. This argument also runs through the appeals of the Association of Imvriotes of Athens. It reflects a doggedly adversarial viewpoint towards the Turkish inhabitants, as well as a form of denial of what happened, and the implications of their changed citizenship status.
- 28 For many returnee visitors to the island, though, the point is to visit their villages, repair their homes, tend their fields, meet lost friends and acquaintances, and pay tribute to ancestors rather than engage in any nationalist rhetorical project of encounter with the "lost homelands" of Hellenism. The personal, family, or local community dimensions of people's thinking about their return was clear in the accounts of a wide range of visitors, whose comments included the following statements.

This is the first time that I have back come, after 23 years (...) one week before my departure I regretted it but it was too late (...) everything was arranged. We've sold everything here (...) fortunately I found our house in a very good condition. The Turk who bought it brought an architect from Istanbul to renovate it. I stay in the first floor and the Turkish proprietor in the upper floor (...) I arranged to stay next summer as well (...). What I couldn't bear was the picture of Shinoudi (...) it is horrible see all these houses without doors and without windows (...) like people without eyes (a middle aged woman from Athens).

I emigrated in France on 1948 (...) I lost my Turkish citizenship and I can't live in my own house. I have to cross the border and reenter the country in order to be able to live here for another three months (a woman in her early sixties).

I left in 1976 (...) I returned for the first time in 1979 for 11 months, and I came now 20 years later. I got a Greek passport just last year (...) I haven't done my military service but I got the passport. I deeply wanted to come earlier but I couldn't. My father died in Athens (...) I wanted to meet him in Imvros (...) I walk by the coffee-houses and I start crying, I can't help it (...) I wanted to meet some people but there was no time to catch them up (a thirty year old man).

When I am in Lemnos I look at Imvros when I am in Imvros I look at Lemnos. I am neither here nor there. I was born here [Imvros], my children were born there (...) the place where my children were born is a better homeland (a man in his forties).

I have torn many trousers up on this stone [showing a certain corner in the square of the village]. Now I can't stay here any more (...) so far I was coming because my mother was alive (...) now she died and I don't want to come back anymore (a man in his forties).

Before, the village was lively from the songs and the voices (...) now loneliness everywhere ... this season the fields were lively, full of people (...) nothing has been left (a sixty years old man).

I visited our field with the farm house. There is a walnut tree there and a spring (...) in the past we used to stay into this farmhouse during the summer time, I grew up in this place (...) as I approached I met Turkish soldiers (...) they stopped me and they asked me where I come from and what I wanted there. "I grew up in this farmhouse" I responded to them "and I want to drink some water (...) where do you come from guys?". After that they softened up (a man in his late fifties).

- 29 For these Imvrii who return back, the island is the place in which they were born and grew up, the home, the field or the concrete stone of experience rather than an abstract, unredeemed Hellenic territory. As Clifford eloquently puts it "peoples whose sense of identity is centrally defined by collective histories of displacement and violent loss cannot be "cured" by merging into a new national community"²⁰. Here as elsewhere²¹, trajectories of exile are narrated in fundamentally moral terms in which the politics of the mother nation remain open to question.
- 30 Yet some exiles, especially those active in organizations of Imvrii, make closer links between their own fate, that of their island, and international relations. Some find homely metaphors to capture the contradictions between the rather abstract Greek government discourse of their inclusion into the national polity, and the realities of their reluctant reception into their home country. As one young Imvrian put it, "We've been caught, in a way, in a sandwich between Turkey and Greece without having any other option". While the Turkish state operated with few constraints to rid itself of an unassimilated and potentially disloyal community with cultural ties to its antagonistic neighbor, Greece's policy toward these undomesticated members of the nation was more complex. Turkish repression and violence operated as the "constitutive outside" that strengthened their own solidarity after the 1960s. A profound sense of commonality with other Greeks emerged, which was based in large part on the Imvriot sense of self as Orthodox Christians, shared with a majority of the Greek nation. The terms Romii and Christians were widely used among the first generation of Imvrii as self-ascription.
- 31 When they came into contact with the Greek state, though, petitions couched in such terms were not always effective. In the "disemic" space of Greek national identity described by Herzfeld²², they highlighted wider pre-national Romeic collectivities rather than the Hellenic dimension associated with the official public domain of Greekness: as a result, the Imvrii refugees found themselves marginalized and underprivileged. By contrast, rhetorical invocations of Hellenism—references to "the cradle of Hellenism", "the Hellenism of Imvros and Tenedos" or "Hellenic homelands"—were already commonplace in political and academic discourses, in which the exodus of Greeks from Asia Minor has often been narrated as a singular tragedy. Under a variety of influences within Greece, some exiled Imvrii came to foreground a sense of their ancestral community as suffering under the enemy of Hellenism. by thus incorporating themselves and their fate into the grand narrative of mass, violent expulsion by "the Turks", Imvrii link their own fate to that of the wider Greek nation.
- 32 This nationalist perspective, representing "the significant other" as physically violent, barbarous and eternally hostile, can coexist with the personal, grounded descriptions of return offered earlier. It is compromised far more by Imvriot memories of peaceful coexistence with their Turkish, Muslim neighbors, especially until the 1960s. Where it

is most directly challenged is in the experiences, and indeed the very existence of Imvrii who stayed behind on the island. They are almost exclusively old people, most of them in their late 70s and 80s. They are usually poorer compared with those who left, less educated and usually have fewer connections with Greece. Their families have often been separated, so that they do not have assistance from their children. They thus represent a form of survivalism, having endured the destruction of their community and lives of limited resources in an inhospitable environment.

- 33 Nationalist rhetoric paints these elderly Imvrii as outstandingly courageous Hellenes who stayed behind to protect a Hellenic homeland in alien territories. Evoking the Spartans who fell resisting the Persian invasion in 480 B.C., they are referred to as "the 300 [warriors] of Leonidas who guard Thermopiles" (*i triakosii pou filoun Thermopiles*). One might expect, as a result, that as a community they would play some symbolic role during the yearly festivities. Yet the following accounts reveal a rather different view of the events around the religious celebration every August, and points towards a different sense of belonging from that projected by the Greek state.

Now that the festival is on our relatives are around and we are fine, but this lasts less than one month and we are too old to participate (...) during the winter nothing but the wind blows through this village and life becomes unbearable (...) some old women cannot move from their houses and there are no shops, no butcher no doctor, nothing. A doctor visits the place once a week and since he is in a hurry to leave there are people who don't catch him either because they are not informed or because they can't move (...) so we lock ourselves in our houses and weep. The old, especially those who have no relatives, are left at the mercy of private donations that don't arrive always in their hands.

Our youth is good only for la-la-la [meaning entertainment].

A woman from Greece asked "Why don't you, the locals, participate in the festival?"

The answer - Do you think that it's easy for us to participate? We can't even sit on a chair, we need our beds to lie on.

They [Greek government agencies] remember us during the festival, and shower us with compliments and promises for assistance. But they forget everything as soon as they go away from Imvros.

- 34 Old people thus express their disillusion with regard to the resurgence of return: they see little by way of potential benefit for themselves, and thus cooperate grudgingly, at best, with the expectations of their Greek guests. An Italian visitor from Istanbul went so far as to venture the opinion that "the Romii who live here do not enjoy the festival; on the contrary they seem to be annoyed by it".
- 35 Such refusal to participate in what has become a yearly affirmation of Imvros' underlying "Greekness" appears to contribute to certain frictions between those who stayed and those who left. Elderly residents are sometimes treated with suspicion by Imvrii who return for the festival. Reasons of this suspicion are their close association and cooperation at various levels with the Turkish population of the island. Occasionally, suspicion takes the form of open accusations for betrayal: "they are traitors because they sold us to the Turks (...) they go to courts and bear witness that our houses and our fields do not belong to us anymore (...) so their friends (meaning the Turks) become able to appropriate our properties". Another interlocutor stressed that "they have been kneaded [mixed up] with the Turks" (*zimothikan me tous Tourkous*).
- 36 On August 1998 after the end of the festival and just before my departure to Greece I visited Nikos²³, who is a permanent resident of the island, in a coffee-shop, to say good-bye. He took me aside to complain about the insults addressed to him in front of me a

few days previously by one of the visitors: "Why did he accuse me of not being a real Greek? My identity card states that I am [name and surname], is this a Turkish name? Haven't I been baptized into a Christian church? Don't I bear a Christian name? What does Nikos mean? What did he want me to do? (...) I had to live here".

37 Angry and bitter, he posed these rhetorical questions, not expecting any answer to challenge his own sense of self. The evidence on which he drew was cultural and religious: the fact that it was in part inscribed upon an artifact of the Turkish state was, for him, not relevant. In this regard, Nikos shared with other old Imvriotes of the island a certain neutrality towards states, whether Turkish or Greek. They do not denigrate Turkey—they must, after all, live there—and they do not view Greece with any particular romanticism. Their symbolic association with Thermopylae is of less interest to them than the failure of the Greek government to provide them with any material assistance in hard times.

38 The elderly who have remained behind stick stubbornly to their homes in spite of the extreme hardships of survival. Most of them have married children in Greece and repeatedly invited to move away so that the family can live together. However, this prospect seems unthinkable for many. In the summer of 1998 I met Kostas, a middle-aged man who was visiting the island twenty years after his flight. The main reason of his visit, he explained, was to take his mother, then in her mid-eighties and living alone, to Athens. To his chagrin, she did not want to consider this proposal at all, "I wish to stay here and to die in my homeland" was her final word.

39 Similarly Elpida, an old woman who recently passed away gave me the following account two years ago:

Expatriation (xepatrismos) is a very hard condition for old people. Fortunately, it was my fate to return and die in my homeland in this old age. When I was been in Lemnos I used to wake up and ask myself in which dami (farmhouse) of the homeland I was, before I realized where I was. Then I would say to myself, I am still in Lemnos (...) when I am going to return to my homeland? She ended her narrative with the following couplet she used to say when she was in Lemnos:

Tis xenitias ta vassana ego den eiha noise
Tora xenaki egina kai toho metaniosei
The suffering of the strange lands I had never felt
Now I am in the foreign lands and I've regretted it.

40 Another permanent Greek inhabitant of the island pointed out:

They ask me to leave the place (...) where to go? It's those who don't understand the worth of this place who speak like that. There is no place for me to make me feel in the same way. At Giougorlou the Turkish state settled refugees (...) they have been provided homes and fields because the Turkish state expropriated their land elsewhere for public interest (...) they know me and they treat me well whenever I go there (...) Mouhtis and other people always offer me a drink.

41 In the short period I spent in Imvros I never heard the permanent residents of the island speak out of themselves as heroic Hellenes in alien territories or as the "guardians of Thermopylae" that some people and institutions in Greece so desired them to be. By contrast, I often heard them complain about the mistreatment of their children in Greece by the Greek state and their own hardship of survival. In spite of the difficulties they face, it is out of the question for them to try and better their daily lives by emigrating to join their children in Greece is out of the question – an attitude that those children cannot understand.

- 42 As Orthodox Christians or Romii who speak Greek and have kin in Greece, they are attached to Greek culture and the polity. As Turkish citizens inhabiting a Turkish territory and having Turkish friends – “they are wrapped up with them”, a visitor from Greece complained – they are attached to Turkish political culture. In spite of their ambivalent links with two antagonistic nation-states, one thing is certain: Imvros is unquestionably their own homeland, a place that they cannot bear to leave for Greece or elsewhere.
- 43 Some of their relatives or former neighbors who visit share similar emotions, but find themselves torn in different ways. Those who found refuge in modern Greece have often invested more energy and hope in that state, and some have sought to shape Imvriot identity in a Hellenic mold. Others retain a strong sense of their own unique and local heritage, and in the light of unhelpful exchanges with the Greek state, feel themselves as belonging nowhere, save perhaps for the duration of the yearly festival on Imvros.
- 44 These divergent experiences force us to recognize the ambiguities in definitions of “home” and “enemy” for Imvrii. Seeing Greek and Turkish old people dwelling together, playing cards in the coffee-houses and cooperating in the practices of daily survival, one is inclined to perceive them as hybrids and to accept that they inhabit a “third space” formed at the interstices of Turkey and Greece. However, when one talks to these locals, the seasonal returnees, and those former islanders who refuse to visit, one is forced to take seriously a range of anxieties related especially to the future of Greco-Turkish relations, and the interpretation of a traumatic past. This “third space” is then quickly revealed as highly vulnerable, and subject to continuous encroachment by the pressures of nationalizing and nationalized visions. Those “stuck” in the homeland as well as those who left and return perceive their Greek selves always as displaced or contested by homogenizing nationalist ideologies. This doubledness, and all the genuine discomfort it engenders, will endure for as long as their personal and family histories and fortunes are caught up in the territorial and symbolic disputes of nation-states.
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ANNEXES

Table with the relevant articles of Lausanne Treaty

Article 14

The islands of Imvros and Tenedos remain under the Turkish occupation, they will have special government consisting of local elements and there will be all guarantees to the non Moslem natives as far as the local government organization and the protection

of people and goods. Order will be maintained by the police consisted of the natives, and be kept under the control of the above mentioned local government.

Article 40

Turkish nationals belonging to non-Moslem minorities shall enjoy the same treatment and security in law and in fact as other Turkish nationals. In particular, they shall have an equal right to establish, manage and control at their own expense, any charitable, religious and social institutions, any schools and other establishments for instruction and education, with the right to use their own language and to exercise their own religion freely therein.

NOTES

1. From the tourist guide I obtained in the island, edited by Erol Saygi.
2. Gökseada is the Turkish name of the island while Imvros is the Greek one. The latter term is used by the members of the community I refer to. Similarly, they use alternatively the terms Imvrii and Imvriotes for self-reference. I follow their practices of self-identification.
3. **Rabinowitz (D.)**, "National identity on the frontiers: Palestinians in the Israeli education system", in Thomas (M. W.), Hastings (D.), ed., *Border Identities: Nation and state at international frontiers*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 156.
4. Tenedhos, in Greek language.
5. See appendix for relevant articles.
6. **Alexandris (A.)**, *O Ellinismos tis Imvrou kai tis Tenedou: I makraioni istoria ton dio Aigaiopelagitikon nision* (The Hellenism in Imvros and Tenedos: The long-term history of the two Aegean islands), Epta Imeres: Kathimerini, 1996, p. 7.
7. According to Association of Imvrii of Athens 90% of their arable land has been confiscated by Turkish authorities.
8. A close-by Greek island where about two hundred people from Imvros took refuge and lived.
9. **Fanon (F.)**, *Black Skin, White Masks*, London: Pluto, 1986.
10. **Anderson (B.)**, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, London: Verso, 1983.
11. People from Imvros see this Greek government policy as an attempt to compel them to stay in the island. By the late 80s, when the acquisition of a Greek nationality was made easier, the island lost almost its entire Rum Orthodox population.
12. **Tsing (L. A.)**, "From the margins", *Cultural Anthropology*, 9 (3), 1994, p. 279.
13. **Hobsbawm (E.)**, *Nations and nationalism since 1780: Programme, myth reality*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
14. **Bhabha (H.)**, *The location of culture*, London: Routledge, 1994.
15. **Appadurai (A.)**, "Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology", in Fox (R.), ed., *Recapturing Anthropology*, Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1991.
16. **Rabinowitz (D.)**, loc. cit.; **Heyman (J.)**, *Land, labor, and capital at the Mexican border*, Flagstaff: University of Arizona Press, 1991.
17. **Gramsci (A.)**, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1996, p. 333.
18. Newspaper *Imvros*, edited by the Imvrian Association of Athens, Spring 1998, p. 4.
19. *Imvros*, Spring 1998.
20. **Clifford (J.)**, "Diasporas", *Cultural Anthropology*, 9 (3), 1994, p. 307.
21. **Ballinger (P.)**, "Remembering the Istrian Exodus: Memory in a transtate context", in Baskar (B.), Brumen (B.), eds., *MESS Mediterranean Ethnological Summer School, Vol. II.*, 1998, p. 58; **Malkki**

(L.), *Purity and Exile. Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. 54.

22. Herzfeld (M.), *Anthropology through the Looking-Glass: Critican Ethnography in the Margins of Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

23. The names I use in this text are not real names, according to the demand of my informants.

INDEX

Index géographique : Gökseada, Grèce, Imvros, Turquie

Mots-clés : réfugiés, échanges de population, Traité de Lausanne

AUTEUR

GIORGHOS TSIMOURIS

Panteion University, Athenes