

## Reimagining Diaspora:

### *The 1923 Greco-Turkish Population Exchange in Turkish Cultural Memory*

*“Throughout the generations, the Turks forgot that they came to these foreign lands uninvited, and they made it their homeland, and they loved it like their homeland.” - Pandelis Prevelákis<sup>1</sup>*

#### Abstract

This article turns towards the legacy of the 1923 Greco-Turkish population exchange in the Turkish cultural sphere. In particular, it demonstrates how common attributes of diaspora within post-1990s Turkish cultural productions about the population exchange renders Muslim refugees expelled to Turkey from Greece more visible as diasporas of given localities within Greece. Moreover, it demonstrates how specific themes within these cultural productions raise questions regarding the oft-interchangeable use of the notions of home, homeland and motherland in studies of diaspora. In order to better demonstrate these concepts, the article focuses on illuminating the particular case of the Cretan Muslims and two post-1990s cultural productions put forth by Turkish citizens of Cretan descent: *Children of War* (1997) by Ahmet Yorulmaz and *My Grandfather's People* (2011) by Çağan Irmak.

**Keywords:** memory, refugee, population exchange, diaspora, Turkey, Greece, Crete, Cretan Muslims, cultural productions, identity, belonging

#### Introduction

This article turns towards the legacy of the 1923 Greco-Turkish population exchange in the Turkish cultural sphere. In particular, it examines cultural productions about the population exchange published since the 1990s, when a shift in Turkish memory politics engendered unprecedented interest in the multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural character of the Ottoman past, and also prompted a more widespread questioning of Turkish identity. Considering how these cultural productions are representative of postmemory in the context of diaspora, particular attention is paid to those produced by descendants of Muslim refugees from Greece expelled to Turkey in the population exchange.

In doing so, this article illuminates how common attributes of diaspora found within Turkish cultural productions about the population exchange have rendered various groups of Muslim refugees expelled to Turkey from Greece more visible as diaspora groups in Turkish society, albeit diasporas of various localities within Greece rather than of Greece itself. It also demonstrates how these cultural productions problematise traditional ways of engaging with the

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from the novel *Girit'te Bir Şehrin Hikayesi* (1997) by Pandelis Prevalikis, a prominent Cretan Greek writer who witnessed and wrote about the expulsion of Cretan Muslims from Crete in the 1923 Greco-Turkish population exchange (quoted in Yilmaz 2011, 160).

notion of diaspora in the academic sphere, especially as regards the oft-interchangeable use of the notions of home, homeland and motherland in studies of diaspora.

In order to better demonstrate these ideas, the article focuses on the particular case of the Cretan Muslims and analyses two post-1990s cultural productions put forth by Turkish citizens of Cretan descent: *Children of War* (1997) by Ahmet Yorulmaz and *My Grandfather's People* (2011) by Çağan Irmak. In the sections that follow, I first provide a brief history of the 1923 Greco-Turkish population exchange and its relation to Turkish memory politics before turning to a brief discussion on the notion of diaspora. From there, I discuss the history of the Cretan Muslim community both before and after the population exchange. Finally, I move towards an analysis of one novel and one film about the population exchange produced by Turkish citizens of Cretan descent.

### **1923 Greco-Turkish Population Exchange**

On July 24<sup>th</sup>, 1923, the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne near Lake Geneva in Switzerland shook both sides of the Aegean Sea, thousands of miles away. On a political level, the treaty ended the hostilities of the 1919-1922 Greco-Turkish War, led to the establishment of a modern Turkish state out of the ashes of the crumbling Ottoman Empire, and also launched a new era in the realms of both Greek and Turkish foreign policy. One of its most momentous impacts on human lives, however, came in the form of a compulsory and permanent Greco-Turkish population exchange, the impact of which continues to reverberate into the present day.

Despite high levels of linguistic and cultural diversity among both Greek Orthodox and Muslim communities at the time, under the Treaty of Lausanne all followers of the Greek Orthodox faith were labelled ethnic Greeks and all followers of Islam were labelled ethnic Turks. Consequently, when the population exchange occurred, millions of Greek Orthodox inhabitants of Asia Minor and Eastern Thrace were expelled to Greece, and hundreds of thousands of Muslim inhabitants of Greece were expelled in the opposite direction to the newly emerging Turkish state. Many of these refugees had little to no cultural connection to their new state of citizenship, and oftentimes did not even speak the language of the nation to which they were told they belong.

Nearly 100 years on, among various communities in Greece and Turkey memories of displacement, the intergenerational transmission of cultural trauma and myths of a lost homeland continue to exercise profound impact on both past and present expressions of identity and belonging to place. In the public sphere, however, official memories of the population exchange have since 1923 differed dramatically in Greece and Turkey. While in Greece the population exchange was absorbed into the Greek national narratives as a major source of cultural trauma, signifying a tragic end to centuries of Greek presence in Asia Minor, in Turkey its memory was instead co-opted by that of a victorious War of Independence under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, as well as annual celebrations of Turkish nationalism.

This tendency towards collective memory in Greece and collective amnesia in Turkey in part attributable to the more staggering impact of the population exchange on Greek society, economy and politics. However, the disproportion has engendered imbalance in academic research, which tends to focus on the impact of the population exchange on Greece, as well as on narratives of Greek Orthodox refugees from Turkey, often excluding the impact of the population exchange on Turkey and narratives of Muslim refugees from Greece. The result of this imbalance is also visible in the constitution of the population exchange as a crucial theme in Greek cultural productions since 1923, yet the comparable absence of representations of the population

exchange in Turkey until the 1990s. In order to better understand the latter, it is important to first examine the foundations of Turkish nationalism as described in the following section.

### **Public Memory in Turkey**

Turkish nationalism was built upon a foundation of forgetting. In efforts to legitimise the new state's existence, the Turkish founders fervently sought to usher in a new era post-1923 and to create the illusion of national homogeneity via erasing the memory of the immediate Ottoman past (Özyürek 2007, 3). In particular, the human costs of the immediately preceding 1919-1922 Greco-Turkish War and 1923 Greco-Turkish population exchange were silenced in favour of a narrative emphasising their political gains, without which it is imagined the Turkish nation would not even exist. As Bruce Clark (2006) has described, "To this day, Turks are taught to look upon this period as sacred history, in which the name of every battlefield, every commander, is memorized and treasured" (22).

In the early years of the Turkish Republic, the Turkish founders also sought to foster national homogeneity through implementing a series of major social and cultural reforms. Among the most notable were the institutionalisation of new ways of speaking, writing, dressing and telling time, as well as the forcible change of naming and family systems (see Neyzi 2002; Özyürek 2007). These reforms not only served as a form of secularisation, as is commonly cited, but also as a means of entirely breaking ties with the centuries-old empire that preceded them, and in particular, rejecting its multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural character (Özyürek 2007, 4-5). In terms of the latter, this left no room for expressions of diversity, rendering invisible the narratives of minorities including the Muslim refugees from Greece forced to move to Turkey due to the population exchange.

This was true until the 1990s, when a shift in Turkish memory politics ushered in a new era of nostalgia for the Ottoman past, along with a more general preoccupation with history as a major cultural commodity (see Algül et al. 2018; Çolak 2006; Iğsız 2007; Neyzi 2002; Özyürek 2007). In part, this shift is traceable to the 1980s culture wars emanating from the rise of the separatist Kurdish movement and its rejection of the notion of Turkish homogeneity, which in turn triggered a more widespread questioning of Turkish identity (Çolak 2006, 587). Some politicians, especially then-prime minister and later President Turgut Özal, thus drew upon the Ottoman past and its once-rejected multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural character in efforts to resolve socio-cultural tensions in the country stemming from suppressed diversity (Çolak 2006, 587). Following this in the 1990s, was thus a decade of the "rediscovery of history in Turkish society" (Neyzi 2002, 138).

In the words of Esra Özyürek (2007), "Almost eighty years after the establishment of the [Turkish] Republic, the children of the founders have a different relationship with history. New generations utilize every effort to remember, record and reconcile the imagined earlier periods" (2). Throughout the 1990s, previously silenced narratives of minorities thus began to surface into the Turkish cultural sphere, including those of the Muslim refugees from Greece forced to take part in the 1923 Greco-Turkish population exchange, along with those of their descendants. As Aslı Iğsız (2007) has pointed out, through representing past and present diversity these narratives created a sense of 'geographic kinship' that superseded traditional notions of belonging along an imagined Greek-Turkish divide, and in turn "invited the public in Turkey today to realise that there are multiple ways in which one could be attached to a land as well as a population" (Iğsız 2007, 162-166).

Since the 1990s, cultural productions illuminating the human cost of the population exchange in the form of oral history collections, memoirs, literature, film, art and more have thus encouraged the Turkish nation to reimagine not only the wider impact of its foundational years, but also the very essence of Turkish identity itself. Simultaneously, themes indicative of diaspora groups that arise from within these cultural productions, such as those of longing for a lost homeland or a liminal sense of identity and belonging, point towards the possibility of considering the various groups of Muslim refugees from Greece expelled to Turkey in the population exchange as being hidden diasporas in Turkish society. This is compounded by the fact that many of these cultural productions are put forth by second, third and later generation members of exchanged communities, which is reflective of the transgenerational transmission of memories of displacement, a commonly cited attribute of diaspora. The particular form these diasporas take, however, is explored further in the following section.

## **Rethinking Diaspora**

In academic research, the notion of diaspora has remained not only persistently vague, but also highly contested. The word ‘diaspora’ is originally rooted in the Greek word *διασπορά* (diaspora), and for most of history, was predominately used to refer to Jews exiled from the Holy Land in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE (Grossman 2019, 1264). However, in recent decades the notion of diaspora in academic research has become somewhat explosive, and having shifted away from its original context, the term is now applied in a seemingly indiscriminate manner to diverse groups of migrants, minorities, religious communities, linguistic communities, political categories and more (see Brubaker 2005; Grossman 2019).

A detailed examination of the various theories and definitions of diaspora that have emerged since this time remains outside the scope of this article. However, in this article I adopt the consideration of diaspora not as a specifically defined group of individuals bound together by ethnic, cultural, geographical or other limits, but rather as an active way of being, or from the perspective of Rogers Brubaker (2005), “a category of practice, project, claim and stance” (13). In doing so, I aim to shed light on the ways in which the experiences of exchanged communities of Muslim refugees from Greece in Turkey, and in some cases the internal act of creating cultural productions that represent these experiences, are reflective of active diaspora identities.

Furthermore, I aim to question not only the various ways in which the notion of diaspora has been used and applied in academic research, but despite criticism aimed at the vast use of the term, also to question the very need to ascribe it with rigid boundaries of definition. In doing so, however, I would like to first draw attention towards a recent study on diaspora conducted by Jonathan Grossman (2019), who through creating and analysing a database containing key terms from the most widely cited articles on diaspora across both the social sciences and humanities, gathered what he deems to be six core attributes of diaspora: transnationalism, community, dispersal and immigration, positioning outside the homeland, homeland orientation and group identity (1269-1275).

In his study, Grossman (2019) proposes the following definition of diaspora: “a transnational community whose members (or their ancestors) emigrated or were dispersed from their original homeland but remain oriented to it and preserve a group identity” (1267). Rather than adopting this definition, I rather seek to adopt Grossman’s (2019) stance that it can be no more than a starting point for further discussion and exploration around the notion of diaspora (1276). While some might argue that an expansion of the way in which we think about diaspora is counterintuitive, especially considering the already-expansive use of the term cited above, I

argue that it is necessary in order to acknowledge the nuanced ways in which diaspora may be claimed, performed, negotiated and lived by real communities. A primary aim of this article is thus to contribute to an expansion of how we think about diaspora by bringing to light lessons learned from post-1990s cultural productions about the 1923 Greco-Turkish population exchange in Turkey.

Although all six of the above-identified core attributes are indeed visible in the narratives of Muslim refugees from Greece forced to take part in the population exchange, as well as in those of their descendants, in some ways these narratives also serve to problematize the surface-level understanding of diaspora. In particular, unlike most Greek Orthodox refugees expelled to Greece in the population exchange, many Muslim refugees expelled to Turkey simultaneously exhibited a profound sense of gratitude towards the Turkish government, and especially towards the Turkish founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, for saving them from what they perceive to have been Greek nationalist fury. From this perspective, the 1923 Greco-Turkish population exchange not only represents a point of tragedy and rupture in their lives, but also the necessary evil that saved their lives and futures.

Moreover, the narratives of Muslim refugees from Greece expelled to Turkey in the population exchange also point towards a profound sense of loss and longing oriented not towards Greece, but rather towards various localities within Greece (see also İğsız 2007, 68). The narratives of these communities thus not only call for a questioning of the oft-interchangeable use of the notions of home, homeland and motherland in studies of diaspora, but also in turn, for the more widespread acknowledgment of diaspora orientation outside the boundaries of imagined national geographies. In order to explore these themes in more depth, this article examines the specific case of exchanged Cretan Muslims, beginning with an overview of this community's unique history in the following section.

### **Cretan Muslims: Past and Present**

Crete did not become part of the Ottoman Empire until 1669, prior to which the island had remained under Venetian rule for over four centuries (Yilmaz 2011, 158). Among both ethnic Greeks and Turks in Ottoman Crete, Greek culture and language was dominant (see Bilecen et al. 2017; Yilmaz 2011). Although Turkish had been declared the island's official language by the Ottoman administration, most ethnic Turks also preferred the use of the Cretan Greek dialect in their daily lives (Yilmaz 2011, 161). Regardless of Greek-Turkish tensions on the island, these two communities thus shared a culture, language and powerful sense of belonging to the Cretan landscape for centuries.

Although some Muslims migrated to Crete from elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire after the Ottoman conquest of the island in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, most Cretan Muslims were actually indigenous to the island. Records indicate that after the Ottoman conquest of Crete, tens of thousands of indigenous Cretans, oftentimes including entire villages, converted to Islam in efforts to avoid the Ottoman state's heavy taxation policies on non-Muslim inhabitants of the empire (Clark 2006, 29). Since this only served to increase the tax burden on non-converts, however, the seeds for Christian-Muslim tension on the island can thus be said to have been planted in these early years (Clark 2006, 29).

Despite their shared Cretan culture and language, throughout the turbulent centuries that followed, rising tensions and at times high levels of bloodshed occurred between Christian and Muslim communities on the island. Among their participation in other revolts, many Cretan Christians also participated in the Greek War of Independence, further stoking Christian-Muslim

tensions, and also contributing to their misperception as a synonym for Greek-Turkish tensions (Yilmaz 2011, 159). During this time, a near demographic reversal on the island took place. Between 1760 and 1897, Crete's Muslim population dropped from an estimated 200,000 to 70,000 inhabitants, and its Christian population rose from an estimated 60,000 to 230,000 inhabitants (Yilmaz 2011, 159).

In late Ottoman Crete, the new Cretan Muslim minority faced extremely high levels of discrimination and harassment (Clark 2006; Yilmaz 2011). Many were forced to leave the island after the success of the Cretan Rebellion against Ottoman rule in 1898, fleeing to places such as Izmir, Bodrum, Antakya, Lebanon or Syria that were still under Ottoman control (Koufopoulou 2003, 211; Yilmaz 2011, 161). After the Balkan Wars and Greece's annexation of the island in 1913, members of the Cretan Muslim community were again forced to flee (Yilmaz 2001, 159). By 1923, the Cretan Muslim population had thus dropped to between 23,000 and 40,000 inhabitants (Yilmaz 2011, 161). The expulsion of these final inhabitants in the Greco-Turkish population exchange thus marked the Cretan Muslim community's final expulsion from the island.

Oral history collections indicate that not unlike other Muslim refugees from Greece forced to take part in the 1923 Greco-Turkish population exchange, upon arrival in Turkey and for many decades following, Cretan Muslims remained marginalised members of Turkish society. On a cultural level, Cretan Muslims stood out due to factors such as the wider variety of ingredients used in their cooking, higher independence and confidence levels among women, practices of religious syncretism and an innate sense of Europeanness and superiority they derived from their Cretan heritage (see Clark 2006; Koufopoulou 2003). Since their mother tongue was a dialect of Greek, language also played a particularly potent role in differentiating Cretan Muslims from local Turks and other refugee groups which had better knowledge of Turkish (Koufopoulou 2003, 214; Yilmaz 2011, 184-185).

In the early years of their arrival in Turkey, and in some cases for decades following, insults such as *yarı gavur* (half-infidel in Turkish) were often levied against exchanged Cretan Muslims, as was the case with many other exchanged groups (see Bilecen et al. 2017; Clark 2006; Koufopoulou 2003; Yilmaz 2011). As recalled by Emine Özenç, who along with her family was expelled from Crete at 9 years old, "The local [Turkish] population didn't welcome us well. Our mother tongue was Greek, for that they saw us as Rum. They said to us, 'You are infidels.'" (Özsoy 2007, 54). Similarly, another member of the exchanged Cretan Muslim community expelled from Crete as a child, Cevher Karahan, recalled, "They [local Turks] called us infidels because we ate snails. When I cooked snails, I would grind their shells into dust and throw them away like this so that the locals wouldn't see" (Özsoy 2007, 62).

Today, Cretan Muslims expelled to Turkey in the population exchange, as well as their descendants, are regarded as full members of Turkish society. Nevertheless, many reside on the western coast of Turkey in Ayvalık and Cunda, where research has shown they have preserved a group identity based on the refugee experience, and to a certain extent, their Cretan dialect and culture (Koufopoulou 2003, 209; see also Clark 2006; Yilmaz 2011). Even among younger generations, the following phrase in Greek is said to be known by heart: *Kriti mou omorpho nisi, to flori toulevanti* (Crete, my beautiful island, the flower of the Levant) (Clark 2006, 33; Koufopoulou 2003, 217). Along with other refugee groups that reside in Ayvalık, despite expressing pride in their Turkish identities, Cretan Muslims thus continue to maintain a significant sense of connection to the Greek world. In the words of Bruce Clark (2006), "People in this town carry their Turkish passports with pride, but some also have a sense that for better or worse, the Greek world helped to shape them, to make them what they are" (27).

Although most Cretan Muslims expelled to Turkey in the 1923 Greco-Turkish population exchange have since passed away, many of their descendants have since the 1990s shift in Turkish memory politics taken an active approach in sharing their stories in the Turkish cultural sphere. In the following two sections, I will thus analyse one novel and one film about the population exchange produced by descendants of exchanged Cretan Muslims seeking to illuminate their family histories: the novel *Children of War* (1997) by Ahmet Yorulmaz and the film *My Grandfather's People* (2011) by Çağan Irmak. In doing so, as outlined in the previous section, I also discuss how the narratives found within these cultural productions aid in challenging and expanding traditional approaches to understanding diaspora in the academic world.

### **Ahmet Yorulmaz, *Children of War* (1997)**

Ahmet Yorulmaz, a second-generation Cretan Muslim born in Ayvalık in 1932, is one of the most well-known Turkish authors of Cretan descent. Born to refugee parents who were expelled from Crete to Turkey in the 1923 Greco-Turkish population exchange, during his lifetime Yorulmaz wrote extensively not only about the long-term impact of the population exchange on his hometown of Ayvalık, but also more broadly on the tragedies of the migration experience (Bilecen et al 2017, 3-4; Yorulmaz 2019, 3). Having grown up fluent in both the Greek and Turkish languages, Yorulmaz also worked extensively on the Greek-Turkish friendship and translated many works of literature from Greek into Turkish (Bilecen et al. 2017, 1; Yorulmaz 2019, 3).

In this section, I will analyse one of Yorulmaz's most well-known novels, *Children of War* (1997), which was translated from its original Turkish version *Savaşın Çocukları* (1997) into English by Paula Darwish in 2019. The novel, in part inspired by Yorulmaz's own family history, is based on information collected in three diaries left behind by a Cretan Muslim who was expelled from Crete in the population exchange and died in Ayvalık in 1948 (Yorulmaz 2019, 9). For this reason, the novel has been likened by Bilecen et al. (2017) to an oral history study, and is also indicative of how firsthand memories of the population exchange have been transformed into postmemory in later generations, a key component of diaspora groups (10).

Set primarily on Crete, the novel follows the journey of an ethnic Turk and Cretan Muslim named Hassan throughout the island's most turbulent decades at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and leading up to the 1923 Greco-Turkish population exchange. First, due to the 1897-1898 Cretan Rebellion against Ottoman rule, as a child Hassan is internally displaced with his family from their village of Kamish to Crete's coastal capital of Chania. After enduring over two decades of war and personal tragedy, Hassan is put in danger due to his relationship with an ethnic Greek and Cretan Christian girl, and is eventually forced to flee the island altogether along with news of a coming Greco-Turkish population exchange. At the end of the novel, Hassan flees to Ayvalık in Turkey via an indirect route through Egypt, Italy, Piraeus and Izmir.

The prominence of local over national identities, which in turn points towards the appropriateness of considering Muslim refugees from Greece expelled to Turkey as diasporas of localities rather than nationalities in the post-exchange era, arises as a significant theme in the novel. Throughout the plot, Hassan repeatedly draws attention to a shared sense of culture and identity among both the Christian and Muslim communities of Crete, and in particular, a shared sense of belonging to certain villages or regions on the island. He narrates, "We were always immersed in both worlds. You can say as often as you like that it is religious unity that makes a

nation a nation, as I'm sure in most cases is true, but the Cretans were an exception to the rule and in the most positive way" (Yorulmaz 2019, 33).

Furthermore, Hassan indicates that ethnic Greeks and Turks on Crete were "utterly melded together" (Yorulmaz 2019, 42). Throughout the novel, evidence of inter-community collectivism – or rather intra-communal collectivism if one follows the implication that the lines between separate communities were blurred – thus continued even in moments of hostility and violence driven by rising Greek and Turkish nationalist sentiment across the island. Notably, during times of war ethnic Greeks and Turks commonly continued their friendships in secret, and/or endangered themselves in efforts to protect neighbours and/or friends from harm's way. One of the most prominent examples of this was in Hassan's relationship with an elderly Greek couple that mentored him throughout the novel, and were it not for the danger it would put them in, almost adopted him as their son.

A certain degree of cultural hybridity between ethnic Greek and Turkish communities in the novel also serves to highlight the prominence of local over national identities on Crete in the pre-exchange period. Hassan reminisces of his community on Crete that, "Our mother tongue had become Greek, and when we were in mourning we wore black like the Greeks, but our religion ensured we never forgot our Turkishness" (Yorulmaz 2019, 32). Not only does this sense of cultural hybridity problematise the very logic of the population exchange, and in particular the assigning of national identities solely on the basis of religion, but it also invites us to think more deeply about the long-term consequences of this choice on exchanged communities and their descendants now scattered across both sides of the Aegean Sea.

Another way in which the novel aids in rethinking traditional approaches to the study of diaspora is through the blurring of lines between the notions of home, homeland and motherland. At the beginning of the novel, Hassan states that, "I always resented the fact that we didn't really know Turkish, which must have been our original language, our mother tongue. The sultans went and scattered us here like seeds, but they didn't take into account our heritage and future" (Yorulmaz 2019, 28). In this excerpt, Hassan refers to a scattering of people not at all unlike those commonly attributed to diaspora groups, and also reveals somewhat of a homeland orientation towards Turkey.

By the end of the novel, however, another layer of Hassan's identity is revealed when he realises that he will be permanently expelled from Crete: "I couldn't imagine leaving my Chania, my Crete, the place where I was born and bred... Anatolia might have been my spiritual homeland, but it was an unknown place to me. My real homeland was Crete" (Yorulmaz 2019, 199). Throughout the novel, two concepts from Hassan's perspective are thus made clear: Crete is his home, and Turkey is his motherland. However, as demonstrated in the contrast between the two above excerpts, for Hassan the notion of homeland isn't so clear.

Although throughout the novel he most often refers to Crete as his homeland, especially after being displaced from his family's village of Kamish as a child and amidst fears of permanent expulsion from Crete, at other times he also considers Turkey to be his homeland. Nevertheless, after reaching Ayvalık in Turkey, Hassan also expresses the following: "Now here I am in Ayvalık, a seaside district in Turkey, my motherland, and it fills me with sadness... I feel strangely out of place" (Yorulmaz 2019, 45). It is also certainly worth noting, that Greece seems to have no place in these constructions of identity and belonging, pointing once again to the prominence of local over national identities in the pre-exchange period.

Through integrating the prominence of local over national identities and blurred lines between the notions of home, homeland and motherland as a theme into the novel, Yorulmaz draws attention to the real-life impact of these experiences on Cretan Muslim and other Muslim

refugees from Greece expelled to Turkey in the population exchange. In terms of how we study diaspora, this also raises crucial questions about the nuances that exist between the notions of home, homeland and motherland, and whether we can continue to use those terms interchangeably in studies of diaspora, whether a diaspora can exist from within the motherland, or perhaps even a second homeland, and also what it means to be part of a diaspora of a locality rather than that of a nation. Keeping these questions in mind, in the following section I will turn to an analysis of the film *My Grandfather's People* (2011) produced by Çağan Irmak.

### **Çağan Irmak, *My Grandfather's People* (2011)**

Çağan Irmak, born in 1970 in Izmir, is a third-generation member of Turkey's exchanged Cretan Muslim community. While the novel *Children of War* (1997) focuses on the pre-exchange period, Çağan Irmak's film *My Grandfather's People* (2011) focuses on the post-exchange period. The film, based on the life of Irmak's own grandfather Mehmet Yavaş, is thus along with Yorulmaz's novel an important indicator of how memories of the population exchange and its long-term impact have been transmitted to later generations, and since the 1990s, have also been actively disseminated into the Turkish cultural sphere.

The film follows the story of a Turkish family of Cretan Muslim descent in Izmir. Their story is primarily told through the eyes of ten-year old Ozan, whose grandfather Mehmet was expelled from Crete to Turkey in the 1923 Greco-Turkish population exchange when he was only eight years old. Throughout the film, Ozan resists acknowledging this part of his family's history. After his grandfather's death, however, he travels to Crete in search of his grandfather's roots, eventually coming to understand them as part of his own roots as well. Through the story of Ozan and his grandfather Mehmet, Irmak's film thus not only serves to model the transgenerational transmission of homeland orientation in diaspora groups, but also how this orientation is often renegotiated and transformed in later generations.

Although Ozan's grandfather Mehmet had become a well-respected shopkeeper in Izmir expressing significant pride in his Turkish identity, and also encouraging his grandson Ozan to do the same, he is also perpetually engulfed in a sense of nostalgia and melancholy regarding his childhood on Crete. Not only does he often narrate idealistic stories about the island to his family and friends, but perhaps more significantly, writes messages in bottles and throws them daily into the sea towards Crete in hopes of in return receiving news of his old family home. Although returning to Crete is his only wish before death, Mehmet is ultimately unable to do so, and later commits suicide by walking into the sea towards Crete while humming a Cretan folksong (Irmak 2011).

In this way, Mehmet's character is representative of the countless Cretan Muslim refugees, as well as other Muslim refugees from Greece forced to take part in the population exchange, that throughout their lifetimes struggled to reconcile their personal expressions of identity and belonging with those ascribed to them by the state. In pointing towards the perpetual longing for a lost homeland, Mehmet's character also contributes to the suggestion that these communities be considered diasporas of certain localities within Greece. Moreover, his simultaneous pride in both his Turkish and Cretan identities points us back to questions about the nuances that exist between notions of home, homeland and motherland raised in the previous section, and in particular, how diaspora groups may continue to exist from within ulterior versions of a perceived home, homeland or motherland.

Mehmet's pride in both his Turkish and Cretan identities is also indicative of cultural hybridity as a significant theme throughout the film. One way in which this becomes visible is

through Mehmet's mixing of the Greek and Turkish languages. Although Turkish is the primary language of most of the film's characters, including Mehmet, he also shifts into his old Cretan Greek dialect in moments of experiencing intense emotions such as joy, anger, and sadness. Although he partakes in Cretan cultural practices such as humming Cretan folksongs, he is also careful to abide by Turkish cultural practices, albeit at times in an almost performative manner. Near the beginning of the film, Mehmet reminds his grandson Ozan to step with his right foot first through a doorway so as not to bring bad luck into his shop, emphasising both their Turkish and Muslim identities (Irmak 2011).

Crucial lessons about the transgenerational nature of diaspora identities may also be learned from Ozan's character. Owing to his grandfather's expulsion from Crete to Turkey in the population exchange, as a child Ozan is often harassed and at times even attacked by other Turkish schoolchildren who call him *yarı gavur*, or half-infidel, despite Ozan's non-understanding of the phrase. Struggling with his experience of alienation, Ozan reacts by dramatising his Turkish identity, and also fervently rejecting his family's Cretan roots. In efforts to prove his Turkishness, Ozan periodically screams out his Turkish identity in angry outbursts, repeatedly salutes Turkish soldiers in the street, angrily shout out the Turkish national anthem, and even join other Turkish schoolchildren in both insulting other migrant families with the phrase *yarı gavur* and attacking their homes. Ozan also echoes to his family town rumours that his grandfather Mehmet is a Greek spy sending intel to the Greek government via the messages in bottles he throws towards Crete, later destroying the bottles in secret (Irmak 2011).

As the film goes on, however, it becomes clear that Ozan's behaviour has very little to do with Turkish patriotism, and much more to do with his desire for acceptance and belonging in Turkish society. Not only does he share this experience of alienation coupled with the desire to belong in Turkish society with his grandfather Mehmet, but also the experience of being excluded from the dominant society of one's perceived home and/or homeland. The only difference is that while Mehmet considers his home and homeland to be in Crete, and his motherland to be in Turkey, Ozan considers his home and homeland to be in Turkey, yet as a young adult, also develops an orientation towards Crete, bursting into tears during a visit to his grandfather's childhood home on the island in the final minutes of the film (Irmak 2011).

From this it is clear that while Mehmet's experience of liminal identity and belonging between Crete and Turkey has been passed down to his grandson Ozan, the particular form that liminality takes in Ozan's life has been transformed. In this specific case, it is transformed into somewhat of a mirror image, constructed in the reverse direction. Through the story of Ozan, Irmak's film thus also raises important questions regarding the transgenerational transmission of the experience of liminality in contexts of diaspora, and more specifically, its transformation throughout time. Once again, this requires a questioning of the oft-interchangeable use of blanket notions of home, homeland and motherland in studies of diaspora, especially in the context of transgenerational transmission and transformations that may occur.

## **Conclusion**

As demonstrated in the two analyses above, post-1990s Turkish cultural productions about the 1923 Greco-Turkish population exchange play a powerful role in rendering various groups of Muslim refugees from Greece forced to take part in the population exchange visible as diaspora groups in Turkish society. Nevertheless, it is crucial that these groups be understood as diasporas that have been scattered from local rather than national homelands. Moreover, as their narratives suggest, academic studies on diaspora are in need of an expansion - rather than a shrinking - of

traditional ways of thinking about diaspora. In particular, it is crucial that rather than using these terms interchangeably, studies of diaspora must begin to explore the nuances that exist between the notions of home, homeland and motherland, as well as their transformations in the transgenerational context. Overall, this also points towards a greater need to break away from the consideration of the nation-state as the primary marker of identity and belonging in global society.

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