

Memories of Imvros (1990-2010): Navigating ‘Lived Space’ in the Ancestral Homeland

[WORKING PAPER]

Compared to first-generation forced migrants, second and later generation members of diasporic communities tend to exhibit a more abstract relationship to the ancestral homeland. However, the Imvriot diaspora is unique insofar as many of its second and later generation members – especially those born in neighbouring Greece - possess a profoundly tangible relationship to the island of Imvros (Gökçeada) in Turkey. Owing to broader socio-political shifts, members of the Imvriot diaspora have nonetheless developed dramatically different relationships to Imvros not based on their status as first, second or later generation migrants, but rather on the time periods in Imvros’ history in which they experienced childhood.

Drawing upon a selection of 16 out of 38 interviews conducted as part of ethnographic research in Turkey and Greece between August 2021 and March 2022, this paper zones in on the personal memories and firsthand experiences of both second and third-generation members of the Imvriot diaspora who were born in Greece between the late 1980s and early 2000s and experienced repetitive visits to the island during their childhoods in the 1990s and 2000s. The paper demonstrates how the ‘lived space’ on Imvros for this age group has been shaped by return migration and the revival of the annual Panagia Festival on Imvros which began in the early 1990s, and in turn, has also exercised considerable impact on their development of a sense of home and belongingness to the island.

After theoretical, historical and methodological briefings, the first section of this paper explores the specific themes of freedom and celebration as integral characteristics of the ‘lived space’ on Imvros. In the second section, varying degrees of emotional attachment to Imvros expressed by each of the 16 research participants are explored. While this paper focuses specifically on members of the Imvriot diaspora who were born in Greece between the late 1980s and early 2000s, its contents form part of a wider study exploring how different age groups within the diaspora experience ‘lived space’ in the same geographic locations on the island in dramatically different ways. Within this broader context, the question of how a sense of home and belongingness to the island has thus not only been transmitted, but also transformed throughout time, is therefore also raised.

Theoretical Considerations

Diasporic imaginings of “home” and “homeland” have taken on major significance in studies of forced migration (e.g. Bonnerjee and Blunt 2019; Grossman 2019). Across generational divides, both imaginations of and experiences in the homeland serve as key contributing factors to the development of diasporic identity and belongingness. By studying the intergenerational differences between these factors, it is thus possible to gain a more in-depth understanding of how a given diaspora’s relationship to its homeland has shifted over time, and in turn, impacted the transformation of diasporic identity and belongingness (e.g. Li and Chan 2018).

As noted above, second and later generation members of diasporic communities tend to possess a more abstract relationship to diasporic homelands. Imaginations of the homeland among second and later generation members of such diasporas thus often derive from family narratives rather than firsthand memory or experience, and have been commonly studied through theoretical lenses such as postmemory, nostalgia and intergenerational trauma (e.g. Davidson 2011; Zembylas

2014). While these factors undoubtedly also play a crucial role in the intergenerational nature of identity and memory in the Imvriot diaspora, an abundance of personal memories and firsthand experience in Imvros play an equally important role in their development of a relationship to Imvros.

Nevertheless, research into the development of diasporic identity and belongingness among second and later generation members of the Imvriot diaspora is largely missing from academic scholarship. Instead, many studies have focused on the memories and experiences of first-generation members of the Imvriot diaspora in the years prior to, during and after their forced migration from Imvros (e.g. Alexandris 1980; Erginsoy 1998; Tansug 2018; Tsimouris 2001). In more recent decades, scholars have also focused on themes such as return migration to Imvros, the revival of the annual Panagia Festival, as well as issues such as citizenship and property disputes that have arisen as a result, albeit none of these studies have focused exclusively on younger generations (e.g. Babul 2006a; Babul 2006b; Tsimouris 2014). This paper contributes to filling both theoretical and empirical gaps through conceptualizing Imvros as a 'lived space' of firsthand memory and experience from which a sense of 'place-belongingness' derives for members of the Imvriot diaspora born in Greece in the early 1990s and 2000s.

The notion of 'lived space' has been borrowed from Henri Lefebvre's (1974) notion of the spatial triad, which comprises of the concepts of 'perceived space', 'conceived space' and 'lived space'. In its simplest form, 'lived space' has been described as the space of users, and is therefore constructed via firsthand memory and experience in a given space (Cavallo and Di Matteo 2021; Lee et. Al. 2010; Lefebvre 1974; Lee; Soja 1996). Following Cavallo and Di Matteo's (2021) work on the island of Lesbos, in this paper the 'lived space' of Imvros can be considered as "the realm of passion, action and lived situations" for those members of the Imvriot diaspora who were born in Greece during the 1990s and early 2000s and also experienced repetitive visits to the island throughout their childhoods (24).

The notion of 'home', which has been described as a place or a feeling that provides individuals or groups with a sense of community and rootedness, is inherently linked to that of 'place-belongingness' (Antonsich 2010; Mee and Wright 2009; Yuval-Davis 2011). For Antonsich (2010), 'place-belongingness' emerges from factors such as personal history and memories, social ties to friends and family, cultural factors including language, religion and cultural traditions, economic stability and safety, and the presence of political belonging in legal status in a given place (647). As this paper aims to demonstrate, the navigation of Imvros as a 'lived space' by members of the Imvriot diaspora born in Greece in the 1990s and early 2000s has played a crucial role in their conception of the island as a second home and site of belonging.

The Greeks of Imvros: 1923-Present

Imvros (Ιμβρος) belongs to the Thracian Sporades archipelago in the North Aegean Sea. Situated 30 kilometres from the Turkish coastline, the island currently forms part of Çanakkale Province in Turkey. According to the Imvriot Diaspora Association, the name Imvros was first mentioned in Homer's *Iliad*, and is believed to have been in use since ancient Greek times (Moustoxydis and Koutlounousianos 2010). While the island's name was officially changed to Gökçeada in 1970 - prior to which it was referred to in Turkish as Imroz - the name Imvros continues to be in use among the Imvriot diaspora, and is thus that which has been adopted in this paper.

Imvros' ethnic Greek inhabitants preserved their Greek language, culture and Orthodox religion throughout periods of both Ottoman and Byzantine rule. According to the 1893 Ottoman census, 9,456 ethnic Greeks, 200 ethnic Turks and 6 Armenians resided on Imvros at the turn of the 20th century (Alexandris 1980; Bozbeyoğlu 2001). Imvros was de facto annexed by Greece during the First Balkan War in 1913, and this arrangement was ratified by the Great Powers via the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres (Alexandris 1980; Tsimouris 2001). After the 1919-1922 Greco-Turkish

War, however, Imvros was ceded to Turkey after Turkish officials raised security concerns over its ownership at the Conference of Lausanne (Alexandris 1980; Oran 2003; Tsimouris 2001).

Under the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, the ethnic Greeks of Imvros were not only exempt from taking part in the Greco-Turkish population exchange, but also granted self-administrative status and minority rights in the new Turkish Republic (Alexandris 1980; Oran 2003; Tsimouris 2001). Nevertheless, these rights were never fully implemented, and since 1923 have instead remained contingent upon fluctuating Greco-Turkish relations (Alexandris 1980; Alexandris 2012; Oran 2003; Tansuğ 2018; Tsimouris 2001; Tsimouris 2014). Ultimately viewed as a barrier to Turkish nation-building, the ethnic Greeks of Imvros were thus socially, politically and economically undermined throughout the 20th century (Babul 2006a; Özyürek 2007; Tansuğ 2018; Tsimouris 2001).

From the perspective of Tsimouris (2001), Imvros' 20th century history can be better understood by division into two main periods: 1923-1963 and 1963 to the turn of the 21st century. In the initial years after 1923, Turkish officials from the mainland set up a new government on the island, and due to the abolishment of Greek as an administrative language, ethnic Greeks were barred from participating (Alexandris 1980; Alexandris 2012). In 1927, a law requiring all schoolteachers to be government-appointed also led to the closer of Greek-language schools on Imvros (Alexandris 1980; Boutaras 2012).

Whereas incoming Turkish settlers managed the island's administrative affairs, Imvros' ethnic Greeks thus primarily remained agriculturalists, with no or limited access to other work or education opportunities. Nevertheless, until the 1960s there was a relatively peaceful level of co-existence between the two communities (Alexandris 1980; Tsimouris 2001). During Greco-Turkish rapprochement in the 1930s, Imvros' ethnic Greeks regained some of their lost rights, and by 1951, had also regained the right to establish Greek-language schools on the island (Alexandris 1980; Alexandris 2012; Oran 2003; Tsimouris 2001).

A turning point for Imvros' ethnic Greeks – referred to by Oran (2003) as “the point of no return” – came after the eruption of Greco-Turkish tensions over Cyprus in the 1960s and 1970s (104). During these decades, and especially after both an incident of violence between Greek and Turkish Cypriots in 1963 and Turkey's invasion of Cyprus in 1974, Imvros' ethnic Greeks faced harassment and discriminatory policies that ultimately forced them to migrate away from the island (Alexandris 1980; Alexandris 2012; Babul 2006b; Tansuğ 2018; Tsimouris 2001). The first massive departures began after 1964, when the right to Greek-language education on Imvros was abolished for a second time, and continued to occur gradually throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Alexandris 1980; Boutaras 2012; Bozbeyoğlu 2001; Tansuğ 2018; Tsimouris 2001).

As other scholars have pointed out, and was also evident in my interviews with first-generation members of the Imvriot diaspora, the establishment of an open-air prison on the island for Turkish mainland prisoners in 1965 was also a significant factor forcing ethnic Greeks to leave the island (Alexandris 1980; Oran 2003; Tansuğ 2018; Tsimouris 2001; Yaykın 2005). Other important factors included the state appropriation of fertile farmlands and a prohibition on cattle-breeding, both of which severely threatened the livelihoods of many ethnic Greek families on Imvros (Tansuğ 2018; Yaykın 2005). In addition to these policies, the island's classification in 1970 as a military zone which could not be visited without a permit from the Turkish authorities contributed greatly to the isolation of Imvros' ethnic Greeks (Tansuğ 2018; Tsimouris 2001; Tsimouris 2014).

As Bozbeyoğlu (2001) has recognized, the Turkish government's efforts to ‘Turkify’ Imvros in these decades involved not only the departure of ethnic Greeks from the island, but also the arrival of ethnic Turkish and other Muslim citizens in their place (14). Notably, strategies involving the latter included the changing of place names from Greek to Turkish, the installation of Turkish Army headquarters on Imvros, and the creation of boarding schools for students from the Turkish mainland (Alexandris 1980; Babul 2006; Bozbeyoğlu 2001; Tsimouris 2014). Moreover, state assistance was allegedly offered to Turkish and other Muslim citizens willing to

resettle on Imvros, and new villages were built to accommodate incoming settlers (Alexandris 1980; Bozbeyoğlu 2001).

By the turn of the 21st century, a dramatic reversal of the island's demographics had thus occurred (Bozbeyoğlu 2001; Tsimouris 2014). Between 1962 and 1980, the ethnic Greek population dropped from 7,540 to 1,077 (Tansuğ 2018, 12). By 2001, only an estimated 230 ethnic Greeks remained on Imvros, having been rendered a new minority among an estimated 8,000 Turkish, Kurdish and other settlers from the Turkish mainland (Yaykın 2005, 18). While Turkish rhetoric often denies it as such, as Tansuğ (2018) has explicitly argued, the displacement of nearly all of Imvros' ethnic Greeks from Imvros was nonetheless a case of forced migration, and has therefore been treated as such in most scholarship on the Imvriot diaspora (19).

By the 1990s, another turning point came for the ethnic Greeks of Imvros, when due to a partial repairment of Greco-Turkish relations, they once again regained some of their denied rights under the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. Notable developments included the restoration of the right to Greek-language education on Imvros, the closure of the open-air prison, and the abolishment of the island's status as a military zone (Alexandris 2012; Babül 2006b). The latter proved to be particularly significant, as it allowed ethnic Greeks from across the Imvriot diaspora to begin visiting Imvros without a permit from the Turkish authorities, and as Babül (2006a) describes, to find "both the chance and the courage to come back to the island" (48; Alexandris 2012; Babül 2006a; Babül 2006b; Tansuğ 2018).

Initially, these visits began with a few higher-educated members of the second generation, who cautiously gathered each August on Imvros for the Panagia Festival and to visit their family's former homes on the island (Babül 2006a; Tsimouris 2014). Over time, their visits became habitual, and by the late 1990s as many as 2000 members of the Imvriot diaspora from around the world were gathering each August on Imvros for the Panagia Festival (Ercan 2021; Tsimouris 2014). In this time period, some members of the Imvriot diaspora also began returning to Imvros for either permanent or seasonal habitation, and while rates of return are by no means massive, the number of ethnic Greeks residing on Imvros has since been slowly rising (Babül 2006a; Babül 2006b; Tsimouris 2001). For this reason, Babül (2006a) has classified the 1990s as the 'decade of return' for the ethnic Greeks of Imvros (44).

In the sections that follow, focus is retained on the experiences of second and later generation members of the Imvriot diaspora who were born during this time period in the 1990s and early 2000s. It is true that since the 2010s, another turning point in the history of the Imvriot diaspora seems to have been unravelling, in no small part due to the reopening of Greek-language schools on the island, both of which prompted more families from the Imvriot diaspora to move to Imvros for their children to attend school (Grigoriadis 2021; Tansuğ 2018). Moreover, a dramatic increase in tourism has further served as a catalyst to Imvros' transformation over time (Sünnecioğlu et al. 2021; Tansuğ 2018). As such, a separate study would be necessary to explore the relationship that members of the Imvriot diaspora born in the late 2000s and early 2010s have to Imvros.

Methodology

The contents of this paper derive primarily from 16 interviews that were selected out of a total of 38 conducted as part of ethnographic field work in Turkey and Greece between August 2021 and March 2022. This fieldwork took place on Imvros when in Turkey, and in Athens and Thessaloniki - the locations in which the two largest Imvriot diaspora communities in reside - when in Greece. The purpose of this field work was to explore intergenerational differences in concepts of diasporic identity and belongingness through the relationship that various members of the Imvriot diaspora express to Imvros, the diaspora homeland.

Throughout the fieldwork process, a wide variety of research participants were selected in an effort to represent the Imvriot diaspora not only across time, but also space. This required

selecting research participants who were born in different time periods throughout Imvros' history and who come from different villages across the island. The 16 interviews selected for use in this paper took place with members of the Imvriot diaspora who were born and raised in Greece during the 1990s and early 2000s, and who also experienced repetitive visits to Imvros throughout their childhoods. Out of these 16 research participants, 6 belong to families that were displaced from the village of Agioi Theodoroi on Imvros, 4 from Panagia, 2 from Glyki, 2 from Agridia and 2 from Schinoudi.

Each research participant took part in a semi-structured interview conducted in either English or Turkish, and during which topics such as their family history, frequency of travel to Imvros and earliest memories on the island were discussed. At the end of the interview process, most research participants also took part in a mental mapping activity designed to both illustrate and prompt discussion more in-depth about their spatial movements and memories on Imvros. While taking part in this activity, research participants were asked to describe memories and emotions associated with specific images or sites across the island that they had deemed personally important. In order to protect their identities, each research participant has been assigned a pseudonym when referred to in this paper.

Imvros as a 'Lived Space'

Most of the research participants born and raised in Greece during the 1990s and early 2000s whose interviews are drawn upon in this paper have been visiting Imvros since the early years of their childhoods. With only a few exceptions, most emphasized that they could not remember a time in which these visits to Imvros were not a part of their family routines. As Thanos (2022) jokingly responded when asked if he could describe his first visit to the island, "I think it was in my mom's stomach. I've been going every year since I was a baby." Aside from four research participants who first visited the island between the ages of 7 and 13, the remaining participants likewise began visiting Imvros with their families in the first few years of their lives.

Discussions of research participant's personal memories and firsthand experiences on Imvros took place during both the interview and mental mapping exercises, albeit more in-depth insight often stemmed from the latter, during which research participants described the physical aspects of their environments and their navigation of various spaces across the island in striking detail. As was evident throughout these processes, the foundation of Imvros' status as a 'lived space' for these participants largely derives from their repetitive visits to the island throughout the developmental years of their childhoods in the 1990s and early 2000s. Although socio-political issues certainly persisted during this time period, personal memories or firsthand experiences related to these issues were notably absent in each of the 16 research participant's narrations of childhood on Imvros.

Rather, focus was retained on more positive memories and experiences linked to permanent or seasonal return migration and the revival of the Panagia Festival. The socio-political circumstances of the 1990s and 2000s on Imvros are what rendered possible the very creation of this 'lived space'. Although the research participants are now experiencing these socio-political shifts as young adults, their personal memories and firsthand experiences of Imvros in the 1990s and 2000s still exercise profound impact on their relationship to and conception of Imvros the island today. Many themes emerged in the discussion of this 'lived space'. However, in this section I zone in on two specific themes shared across the 16 interviews: freedom and celebration.

The theme of freedom is fundamentally linked to the context of simplicity. In the 16 research participants' descriptions of the Imvros of their childhoods, it is evident that their memories and experiences preceded the touristic growth and other forms of development that have visibly occurred on the island in more recent years. Instead, throughout their narratives most research participants describe traditional village life. Penelope (2021) recalls, for example, "When I went [to Imvros] for the first time, we didn't even have water in the house. We had to go to the wells to get water and put it in the sun to get warm." As Nefeli (2022) remembers from this time period in *Panagia*, "When we were like five years old, there was nothing – only one *çay bahçesi* (tea garden)- just one, and some patisseries - and that was all."

Within this theme of simplicity, a sense of isolation from social networks in Greece also emerged as a significant theme (e.g. Anastasia 2021; Angelos 2022; Basil 2022; Maria 2021; Nefeli 2022; Orfeas 2022; Penelope 2021; Spiros 2021). As Markos (2022) described:

This period that I was in Imvros, it was a time that I did not have internet connection – we didn't have smartphones. I couldn't contact anyone from Greece ... so when I went to Imvros, my connection to the world in which I was the rest of the year was cut...but I always had a really good time in Imvros because I *knew* that I couldn't have constant frequent contact with other people from Greece, so that could allow me to not think of anything from back home, and to just be there.

As is evident in the above excerpt, this isolation was nonetheless described in both positive and negative manners. While some research participants recalled a sense of boredom, most simultaneously expressed a sense of nostalgia for the space of freedom that the context of simplicity created (e.g. Anastasia 2021; Basil 2022; Maria 2021; Orfeas 2022; Penelope 2021).

One way in which this manifested was through rendering the research participants more perceptive to – and also in touch with – the natural environment around them. It is clear in the narrative of all 16 research participants that most of their time on Imvros during childhood was passed in outside setting such as beaches, mountains, gardens or even village streets. Several research participants also specifically emphasized that their most valuable memories on the island derive from simply wandering through the areas close to their family's villages, whereby they stumbled across seemingly untouched natural sites or ruins embedded in the landscape (e.g. Anastasia 2021; Orfeas 2022; Penelope 2021; Zoe 2022).

A notable theme was that this connection to nature was often described in opposition to the research participant's experiences in Greece. For example, in the context of discussing her important memories from Imvros, Penelope (2021) explained, "So here in Athens you can't really see the stars...but whenever I went home [in Imvros] after a long night out, I remember going back and just looking up to the sky and seeing nothing but stars –you couldn't even see the black – there were *that* many." In the context of a similar discussion, Markos (2022) remarked, "We climbed to the top of the mountain, and it was liberating. I loved it, I was almost crying." Such sentiments are important because they demonstrate how a 'lived space' of freedom on Imvros derived not only from the context of simplicity, but was also enhanced by the seeming lack of simplicity in the other 'lived spaces' of research participant's lives in Greece.

In large part, research participants described a sense of stepping out into the 'lived space' of freedom on Imvros once they left interior spaces on the island such as their family's homes. As Christina (2022) recalls, "I was feeling free there, because it was away from the city. You go to the villages and you can play outside. In Thessaloniki, I was inside...even when I was five or six years old, it wasn't a problem for us to go outside and play with other children." Similarly, Spiros (2021) reminisced, "When I was young, I would definitely prefer going to the island, and the reason for that is the freedom. You go out of the house and then you're on your own. In all of Greece, or anywhere else I went, kids don't have that - so that was very important."

Interestingly, this sense of freedom described by research participants was oftentimes coupled with descriptions of safety and security. For example, as Maria (2021) recounted of her childhood years on Imvros:

My summers here were full, I have so many memories, good memories. We were mainly children, and every day we would go out, I would go to my friend's house – not call him, there were no telephones, nothing, no television. No such thing. We would go to the sea, to the beach, for swimming - even late at night. I would be outside all day and all night and I would come home at 4:00 o'clock or 5:00 o'clock in the morning, and me and every child would feel this this incredible thing that we are completely free and that we were not afraid of anything or anybody and that nobody can harm us. So yeah, for me August was the best time of the year.

Expressing similar sentiment, Zoe's (2022) explained, "That's the magic in Imvros, in my opinion, because we believe when we are there that all of the island is our home - and we are so comfortable to do *anything* there - to walk, to be out late at night with your friends outside of your home, and we are secure and comfortable with people to speak, to say 'Hello, where are you from?' and 'Welcome to our island.' It's very, very different than what we do here in the city."

In his own memories of Imvros, Orfeas (2022) draws together the various themes described in this sub-section: simplicity, connection to nature, freedom and security:

I've been feeling that it [Imvros] has lost its authenticity and its traditional character, and because I remember this character from my childhood it's even more dreamful. I think it was the fact that it was away from everything, so when I would go there I would cut my contacts with the real world, with the city, with my friends from Thessaloniki, and I would just be like an elf in nature [laughs]. This is how I remember myself - going out without shoes, wearing the same clothes, getting dirty, being at the beach for hours. Not feeling afraid, not feeling that we're doing anything dangerous. Not just us, even our parents - I remember when I was eight years old, I would go out on my own for hours and come back like at midnight. But now that my sisters are like 12 and 14 years old, I feel insecure when they're out. I don't mean that we've had incidents of violence - but it's just that you don't feel like it's an island that nobody knows anymore. We have many people coming.

As his testimony demonstrates, this 'lived space' also seems to belong to the specific age group of the Imvriot diaspora that is the focus of this paper. Indeed, during the research process some research participants indicated that these characteristics of the 'lived space' on Imvros are seemingly disappearing due to touristic development and other factors, and were thus in large part reliant on the socio-political circumstances of the 1990s and 2000s (e.g. Basil 2022; Maris 2021; Markos 2022; Spiros 2021; Thanos 2022).

Spaces of Celebration

In many ways, the space of freedom described in the previous sub-section is linked to conceptions of Imvros among this age group within the Imvriot diaspora as a summer destination in which the responsibilities of everyday life seemingly dissipate. Indeed, the personal memories and firsthand experiences of summertime on Imvros described to me by research participants are not only riddled with narratives of freedom, but also of laughter, joy, gathering and other similar themes. In this sub-section, Imvros as a 'lived space' of celebration is thus explored.

The theme of celebration on Imvros is fundamentally linked to the practice of community gathering. Many research participants not only described partaking in daily activities such as visiting the beach, strolling through village streets, going on hikes and engaging in small or large organized

festivities, but also emphasized that they could not recall moments in which they partook in these activities alone. Owing to their simultaneous status as sites of gathering, these spaces were thus also overwhelmingly linked to positive emotions such as joy and laughter. Zoe (2022), for example, associates a specific site in her family's village with "always dancing, we had so many dances there, and smiles - there were so many smiles."

In this way, summertime was also described as a temporal space of gathering and continuous activity, which as opposed to other times during the year, metaphorically awakened the island itself. While describing how Imvros' atmosphere transforms throughout the year, Anastasia (2021) explained:

In summer it's actually the best period to go, because all the people are going to be there. There are a lot of events. We do parties for the youth, or we're doing festivals where we're dancing and eating and all of that. So, when you go in August, especially the around the 15th of August, there are a lot of people, a lot of Greeks there. So, every day you're doing something - you go to the beach, and then you have something to do at the afternoon, and then at night as well. So, you're going hard, you're doing a lot of stuff.

From a similar frame of mind, Orfeas (2022) recalled of his early childhood years, "In our circle and with our family and our friends, it was a very vibrant summer. We were having a lot of fun... we've grown up always finding reasons to play music and have fun...and as you can see, I'm mainly speaking about parties, because this is what Imvros is in our minds right now."

Across the narratives of all 16 research participants, a focal point of these themes of gathering and festivity was the Panagia Festival, and in turn, its surrounding events which take place in the days immediately prior and following August 15th. In particular, Penelope (2021) noted how these events are key in uniting members of the Imvriot diaspora who reside in different villages into a single space: "From all the villages, we will come together and have those festivals and parties. There are specific dates that they happen, and we also - as the younger generation - we do our own parties." Angelos (2022) also reminisced that when in Greece, "Every day I remember the celebrations in August. It's the best month of the year, *every* year." As Thanos (2022) explained, the younger members of the Imvriot diaspora not only participate in these activities, but at times also take a leading role in their planning and execution: "For example, on the 14th of August, there is a tradition to cook the meat at night. We are cooking all night some of us, most of us are young people. The next morning on the 15th, there is a church celebration. There are so many people - we serve them the meat, and then at night we have the big festival."

Interestingly, when discussing celebration on Imvros, several research participants also described a feeling of being in Greece rather than in Turkey, which although is not the focus of this paper, is linked to the broader socio-political conceptions of belonging in the region. As Alexandra (2021) described, "In the summer we have festivals, it happens in every village - and all the villages are becoming alive in a way...you feel like you've come for holidays in the Greek islands, and you feel like you are in Greece. Maybe it's a bit far, but it's very close to our hearts." Similarly, Christos (2021) recounted, "The first time that I came here [to Imvros], it was really strange for me because I was so young... we passed the borders, and I started to see Turkish flags everywhere...then I remember that I came here and everyone was speaking in Greek, listening to Greek music - there was a big celebration with Greek traditional music, Greek traditional food, and I asked my mother, 'Mom, where are we? Are we in Turkey or in Greece?'"

In a certain sense, the themes of celebration and gathering on Imvros in the summer months may seem to contrast with those of simplicity described in the previous sub-section. One important point to raise, however, is that crowding on the island is discussed in a positive manner when it is caused by members of the Imvriot diaspora, but in a negative manner in relation to Turkish or other tourists (e.g. Anastasia 2021; Basil 2022; Maria 2021; Orfeas 2022; Penelope 2021). Nonetheless, this contrast illuminates another crucial point, which is that multiple layers of

'lived space' may overlap at any given time. This is true not only for different individuals or groups navigating the same geographical space, but also in the sense that any single individual or group experiences multiple dimensions of 'lived space' at once. In the following section, the impact of navigating these various layers of 'lived space' on the development of diasporic identity and belongingness of the research participants is explored.

Imvros as a Site 'Place-Belongingness'

Many members of the Imvriot diaspora born in Greece between the late 1980s and early 2000s foreground their Imvriot identities and express a feeling of belongingness to the island not only as an ancestral homeland, but also as somewhat of a second home filled with firsthand memory and experience. The island's fixed presence in their lives, described repetitively as something that has 'simply always been there' has been woven so deeply into the fabric of the research participants' lives that years in which they were unable to visit the island – such as during the COVID-19 pandemic – were described as having a destabilizing and unsettling effect (e.g. Anastasia 2021; Angelos 2022; Nefeli 2022; Orfeas 2022; Penelope 2021; Thanos 2022; Zoe 2022). In no small part owing to repetitive visits to Imvros throughout their childhoods, most research participants therefore described their membership in the Imvriot diaspora and relationship to Imvros as central aspects of their identities. In this section, overarching patterns in the varying degrees of familiarity, emotional attachment and overall sentiments of 'place-belongingness' expressed by each of the 16 research participants are explored.

One significant pattern through which a sense of 'place-belongingness' to Imvros emerged was the expression of a sense of longing and anticipation to visit the island in periods in which research participants were in Greece. For Orfeas (2022), this feeling was described as "breathing and living for that month in the summer." Similarly, Spiros (2021) reminisced, "For me as a child, it was like nowhere else, and every summer I was waiting to go." Similarly, Nefeli (2022) described her emotional experience upon arriving on Imvros each year in the following manner: "I feel happiness. It's the thing that I have in my mind throughout the year, and it's finally happening when I go back. I'm feeling like ok, it's ok - I'm ok now." As an object of both stability and anticipation, Imvros is thus clearly central to the lives of many research participants both within and far away from the 'lived space' they navigate when physically present on the island.

Although the majority of research participants described feeling a sense of belongingness to Imvros, it is crucial to acknowledge that a sense of liminality between various sites of home and belonging in Greece, Imvros or other locations also emerged as a common factor within their narratives. For example, when asked how she typically answers the question 'Where are you from?', Zoe (2022) responded: "I say Imvros, but actually I'm from Thessaloniki. I'm actually from here because I was born here and lived here, and I'm living here - but I suppose that my heart is there. Yes, because most of the times, most of the year - I was there. My first birthday, my first everything - they were *there*. So, I feel that I'm from there too." As Zoe's testimony demonstrates, those research participants who foreground their Imvriot identities often also describe experiencing important life milestones on the island.

When asked what place he considers to be his home, Markos (2022) remarked "I would say Athens, but there is more to it than that...my mother is from Imvros, my father is from another place, which I have visited *more* than Imvros. And I spent *more* time there as a child than in Imvros. But still, right now I feel more connected to Imvros. I feel like home in Imvros, and Imvros has a special place in my heart - but I was born and raised here in Athens." As Dimitris (2022) also shared, "When I was younger I used to say Thessaloniki, but now I say Imvros, because I've been to the island so many times, and I think that it's something special to me." As several research participants also directly noted, these testimonies demonstrate that the seemingly simple question of 'Where are you from?' is often much more complicated for members of the Imvriot diaspora

born in Greece (e.g. Angelos 2022; Christina 2022; Christos 2021; Dimitris 2022; Maria 2021; Nikos 2021; Markos 2022; Thanos 2022).

In addition to these factors, the theme of struggle also emerged as a significant pattern in some research participant's testimonies regarding the development of a sense of home and belongingness to Imvros. In this respect, Anastasia (2021) expressed, "Maybe I can be more passionate about the island because it's not in Greece. So, it's harder, it's harder to go there, it's harder to do stuff there - everything is harder, and the whole thing about it, that it's hard - it makes you to love it more. To be more passionate about it... because I don't live there, and I cannot have it, and when you don't have it you want it more." Throughout the interview process, a few other research participants expressed similar sentiment regarding themes such as the necessity of crossing Greek-Turkish borders or their interactions with Turkish authorities (e.g. Maria 2021; Niko 2021; Orfeas 2022; Penelope 2021).

Nonetheless, it is also important to recognize that in a few cases research participants indicated that they do not share either a sense of home or belongingness to Imvros expressed by many of their peers in the diaspora. While explaining that Imvros is an annual continuity in his life, and also relating an emotional attachment specifically to his family's house in *Glyki*, Basil (2022)'s perspective is representative of second and later generation members of the Imvriot diaspora who do not feel a significant sense of 'place-belongingness' to the island itself: "My father, he tried to raise use with a sense of belonging to Imvros, and he tried to - so hard - to connect us with the island, and the history, and the house, and all these things - and I'm talking as a 'we' because I have a brother - but I think that he didn't actually manage to connect us."

During her interview, Christina (2022) also distinguished between sentiments of belongingness to Imvros and conceptualisations of the island as a home or homeland. While she embraced the former, she rejected the latter: "No, I don't feel like Imvros is my homeland. I don't have myself this feeling, but I see this in others - in their eyes, and what they say - it's their home, their homeland. I love it. I can live there. I want to go back there, but I don't feel like it's my homeland." Citing family dynamics in a manner similar to Basil, she continued:

I don't know what time it started, but even if I was 2-3 years old, my father always said to me, 'Where are you from? You are from Imvros. Where are you from? You are from *Imvros*.' So, I was getting bigger, and every time someone asked me this question, I was saying Imvros, Imvros, Imvros. So now, the first answer that goes to my head, to my mouth, is Imvros - but actually I was born and raised in Thessaloniki. I'm from Thessaloniki, but it always started as Imvros, Imvros, Imvros - as the roots.

These excerpts not only serve as a reminder that the lines between abstract concepts such as belongingness and non-belongingness are not always clear-cut, but also that while the navigation of 'lived space' on Imvros is key in the development of diasporic identity and belongingness among second and later generation members of the Imvriot diaspora, family dynamics also play an important role and cannot be discounted.

From the research participant's narratives, it is clear that non-familial relationships within the Imvriot diaspora also play a significant role in the development of a sense of diasporic identity and belongingness. Some research participants described this through the lens of social relationships created via participation in the activities of the diaspora associations located in Athens or Thessaloniki. This was more common among research participants who were born and raised in Athens, where the largest and most active association is located, and where several research participants have been periodically engaging in weekly activities since their early childhoods. Nevertheless, in both cases, the associations seek to provide a space of gathering for the diaspora community throughout the year.

Dimitris (2022) described the efforts of the associations in the following manner: "This is an organization where every person can feel the place as a home. The first home is Imvros, and

the second one is here. If they come here, we can make memories.” Social relations in the diaspora associations are particularly significant because research participants raised in both Athens and Thessaloniki described a transfer of their social circles within the diaspora associations into the ‘lived space’ on Imvros, primarily in the summer months during which thousands of members of the Imvriot diaspora are present (e.g. Anastasia 2021; Dimitris 2022; Penelope 2021; Ulysses 2022; Zoe 2022). As connections built and maintained in this manner tend to exist between members of the Imvriot diaspora who belong to similar age categories, when carried into the ‘lived space’, they also have a significant impact on the types of experiences and memories that derive from it.

Nonetheless, a few research participants indicated feeling a sense of belongingness and home on Imvros that derives from social inclusion by community elders with whom they do not have significant contact, some of whom since the 1990s and early 2000s have resided either part-time or seasonally on the island. For example, Ulysses (2022) shared, “I go to Imvros, some people know me without me even telling them who I am. Because they are friends of my grandmother or grandfather. It makes me feel that I belong there. If I walk in this street [in Thessaloniki], where I’ve been for 24 years, nobody knows me! So, in that way, I feel that Imvros is home.” Likewise, Christos (2021) expressed, “I feel that I belong here [in Imvros]. If I go to a house in this village or in another village, I can just open the door and go inside. No one is going to be like, ‘What are you doing?’ They will just ask you from which family you come, I will tell them I’m from [Anna’s] family, and they will say ‘Come in, what can I get you, do you want to drink something?’”

As with most patterns, the reverse is also true. From Christina’s (2022) perspective, just as a sense of belongingness to Imvros may derive from positive social relations on the island, social relations may also be built and maintained due to a previously-existing shared sense of ‘place-belongingness’:

I feel like I belong to the island, but to be honest, I don't like everybody from the island...but I feel that we have the same energy about this place, and I like *that* about them. When I meet them, I'm so happy because I know that we know how it was back then - not back then, like in the 1950s, but back then when I was a child...so even if I don't like you very much, I *like* you because we have the same energy about this little place on Earth.

As these testimonies illustrate, a sense of belongingness to both the Imvriot diaspora and Imvros itself are intricately intertwined. Several research participants pointed to social relations within the diaspora being more intimate than those they experience outside of the diaspora, especially when navigating the ‘lived space’ on Imvros (e.g. Markos 2022; Nikos 2021; Ulysses 2022; Zoe 2022). The interdependency of these two factors thus often plays out in both the individual and collective ‘lived spaces’ of Imvros experienced by members of all generations of the Imvriot diaspora.

Concluding Remarks

Throughout this paper, the personal memories and firsthand experiences of ‘lived space’ on Imvros for members of the Imvriot diaspora born in Greece between the late 1980s and early 2000s was explored from both a temporal and spatial perspective. In turn, it demonstrated that the socio-political circumstances that enabled gradual rates of return migration to Imvros and the revival of the annual Panagia festival beginning in the early 1990s enabled this age group within the Imvriot diaspora to create a ‘lived space’ in their ancestral homeland that differentiates them from other diaspora groups.

Additionally, the paper explored how the implications of repeatedly navigating ‘lived space’ on Imvros, has for second and later generation members of the Imvriot diaspora also exercised profound impact on their development of a sense of ‘place-belongingness’ to the island. As a result, rather than considering the island to be a lost homeland, many have experienced the island as the site of important life memories and milestones. Consequently, the study also demonstrates

that the ‘lived spaces’ of home and belonging on Imvros have not only been transmitted throughout time, but also dramatically transformed.

Although not the explicit focus of this paper, the 16 research participants’ narratives struck a stark contrast with those from other research participants that inform Imvros’ status as a ‘lived space’ in earlier decades, especially among those in the first-generation who were forcibly displaced from the island between the 1960s and 1980s. Within the field of diaspora studies, this in turn beckons the need to move beyond questions of intergenerational transmission, and to instead further examine questions of how diasporic identity and belongingness within the context of other diaspora groups has also transformed throughout time.

Interviews

Maria [pseudonym]. Interview with Laura Brody. Personal communication. Zeytinliköy, Gökçeada, Turkey, August 15th, 2021.

Christos [pseudonym]. Interview with Laura Brody. Personal communication. Bademli, Gökçeada, Turkey, August 16th, 2021.

Spiros [pseudonym]. Interview with Laura Brody. Personal communication. Néa Smýrni, Athens, Greece, November 30th, 2021.

Anastasia [pseudonym]. Interview with Laura Brody. Personal communication. Néa Smýrni, Athens, Greece, December 3rd, 2021.

Penelope [pseudonym]. Interview with Laura Brody. Personal communication. Néa Smýrni, Athens, Greece, December 3rd, 2021.

Alexandra [pseudonym]. Interview with Laura Brody. Personal communication. Néa Smýrni, Athens, Greece, December 6th, 2021.

Basil [pseudonym]. Interview with Laura Brody. Personal communication. Thessaloniki, Greece, February 17th, 2022.

Ulysses [pseudonym]. Interview with Laura Brody. Personal communication. Thessaloniki, Greece, February 18th, 2022.

Zoe [pseudonym]. Interview with Laura Brody. Personal communication. Thessaloniki, Greece, February 18th, 2022.

Dimitris [pseudonym]. Interview with Laura Brody. Personal communication. Thessaloniki, Greece, February 24th, 2022.

Thanos [pseudonym]. Interview with Laura Brody. Personal communication. Kalamaria, Thessaloniki, Greece, February 25th, 2022.

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Markos [pseudonym]. Interview with Laura Brody. Personal communication. Néa Smýrni, Athens, Greece, March 1st, 2022.

Orfeas [pseudonym]. Interview with Laura Brody. Personal communication. Neo Iraklio, Athens, Greece, March 5th, 2022.

Nefeli [pseudonym]. Interview with Laura Brody. Personal communication. Neo Iraklio, Athens, Greece, March 5th, 2022.

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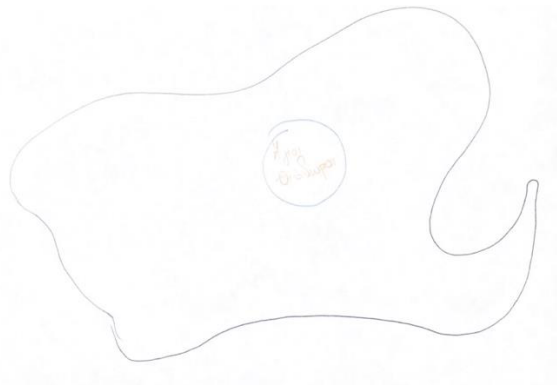
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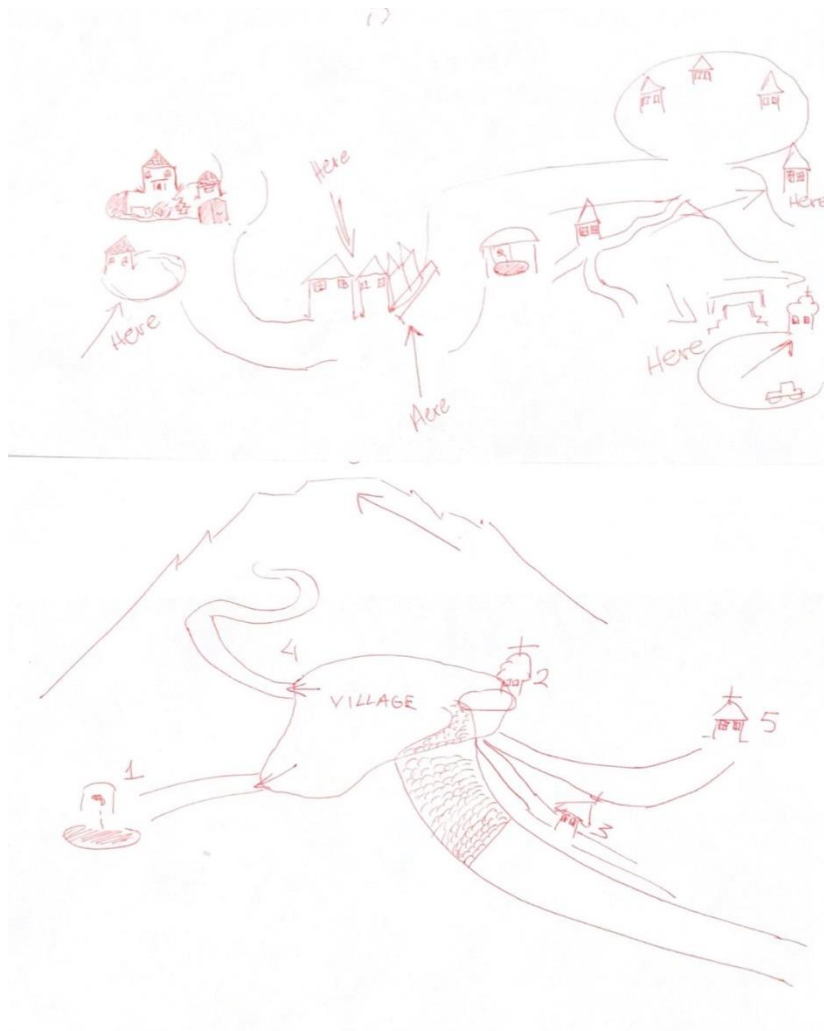
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Mental Maps

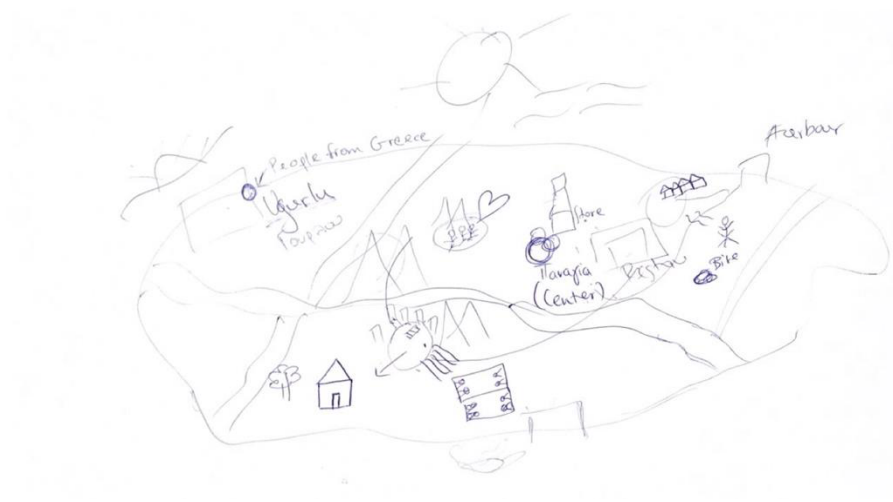
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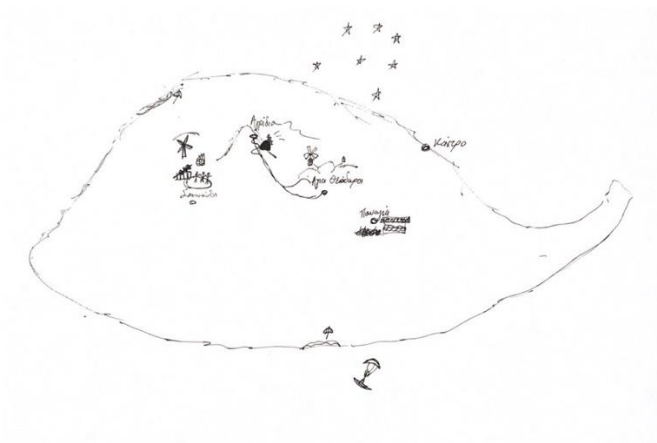
2. Agioi Theodoroi. Spiros. November 30th, 2021. Athens, Greece.



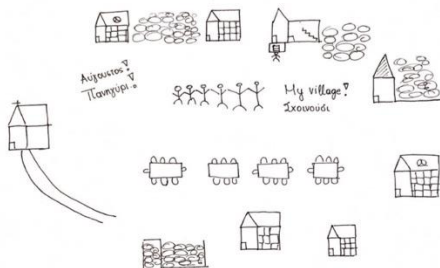
3. Imvros. Anastasia. December 3rd, 2021. Athens, Greece.



4. Imvros. Penelope. December 3rd, 2021. Athens, Greece.



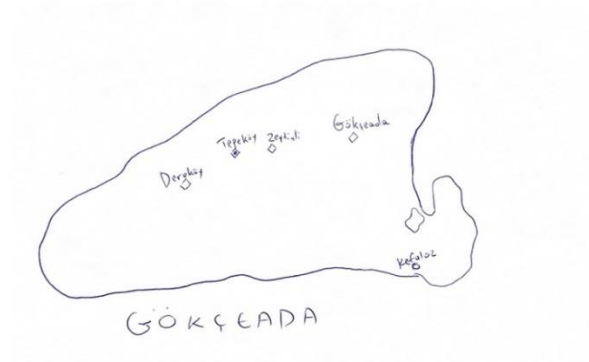
5. Schinoudi. Alexandra. December 6th, 2021. Athens, Greece.



6. House in Glyki. Basil. February 17th, 2022. Thessaloniki, Greece.



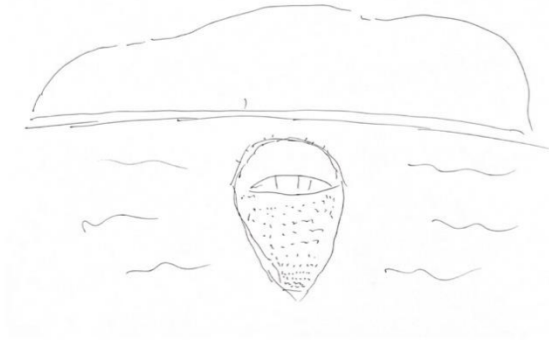
7. Imvros. Ulysses. February 18th, 2022. Thessaloniki, Greece.



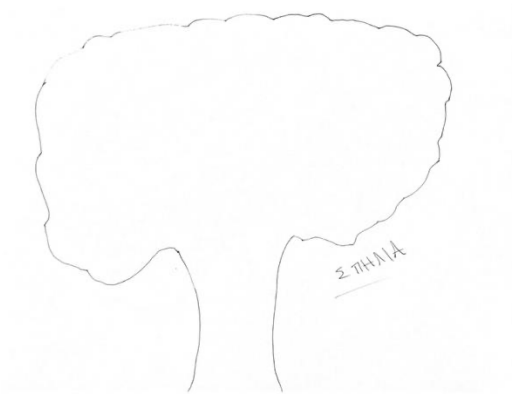
8. Imvros and Agioi Theodoroi. Zoe. February 18th, 2022. Thessaloniki, Greece.



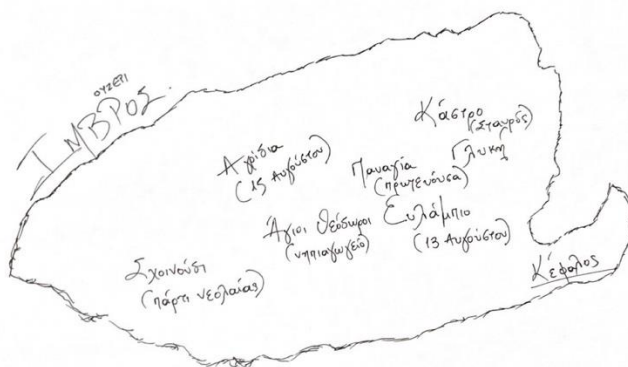
9. Ferry to Imvros. Dimitris.. February 24th, 2022. Thessaloniki, Greece.



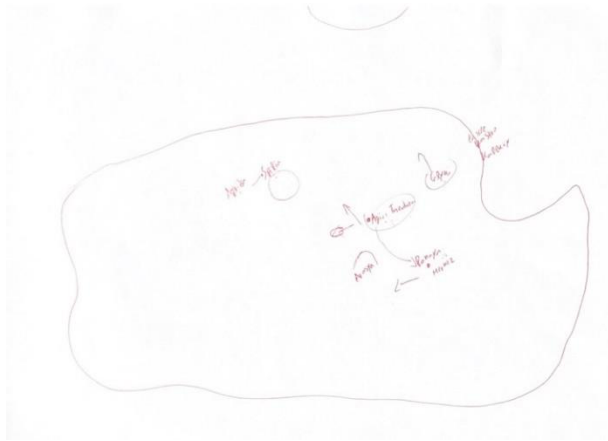
10. Tree in Spilia. Thanos. February 25th, 2022. Kalamaria, Thessaloniki, Greece.



11. Imvros. Angelos. February 25th, 2022. Kalamaria, Thessaloniki, Greece.



12. Imvros. Markos. March 1st, 2022. *Néa Smyrni*, Athens, Greece.



13. Imvros. Orfeas. March 5th, 2022. *Neo Iraklio*, Athens, Greece.



14. Imvros. Nefeli. March 5th, 2022. *Neo Iraklio*, Athens, Greece.

