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Children of Memory: Narratives of the Asia Minor Catastrophe and the Making of Refugee Identity in Interwar Greece

Haris Exertzoglou

Abstract

This article examines the organization of the memory of Asia Minor in Greece during the interwar period. The disastrous Greek defeat in the Greek-Turkish War (1919–1922) and the subsequent Treaty of Lausanne together constitute a major turning point in the history of Modern Greece. Not only did these events end Greece’s irredentist dream, but they also led to the uprooting of 1.5 million Greek Orthodox people from Asia Minor and their resettlement in Greece. Despite its importance, the trauma that the exodus inflicted on refugees and non-refugees alike was not treated at the time as a subject in its own right; rather, it was subsumed within competing nationalist narratives that were directly related to the ongoing political conflicts that beset interwar Greece. Refugee associations negotiated the memory of Asia Minor for the purpose of achieving the integration of refugees into mainstream society without ever directly addressing the burden of the trauma itself.

The idea of Asia Minor is deeply embedded in the structure of Modern Greek identity for two main reasons. First, since the nineteenth century, the region had been celebrated in the Greek national narrative as part of the country’s imagined homogenous, national space. Second, it was the physical territory where hundreds of thousands of Greek-speaking Orthodox Christians had lived for centuries until they were forced to abandon their homeland in 1922. Consequently, Asia Minor occupied an important place in the Modern Greek national imagination.¹ The forced population movement that was one result of the Greek-Turkish War (1919–1922), an event referred to in Greece as the Μεγάλη Καταστροφή (Great Catastrophe, hereafter referred to simply as the Catastrophe), is widely considered as a central turning point in Greek history. The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne mandated a compulsory exchange of populations that affected more than 2 million people, including approximately 1.5 million Christians who lived in Ottoman lands and 400,000 Muslims who resided in

former Ottoman provinces annexed by Greece in the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913 (Pentzopoulos 1962; Kontogiorgi, 2006; Yildirim 2006a, 2006b). After the collapse of the western front in Asia Minor in August 1922, civilian casualties became widespread, but even from the early stages of the conflict, attacks on noncombatants were commonplace. Ethnic cleansing was employed by both sides to stabilize defensive lines and supply routes, and in many respects these practices were reminiscent of similar policies employed by the opposing states during the Balkan Wars and the First World War.² In August and September 1922, hundreds of thousands of Greeks sought safety on the Aegean shores or left the area to seek refuge on Aegean islands and in other Greek ports. Thousands died in the effort, while an even larger number perished at the hands of the advancing Turkish nationalist forces.

The experience of expulsion, bitter and traumatic as it was, affected hundreds of thousands of Ottoman Christians who left their homelands during and after the war. The human cost was enormous: dislocation, violence, and the loss of property and life beset Christian civilians, who had to abandon everything in an attempt to save their lives. When they first arrived in Greece, the refugees presented a miserable sight. Settlement in the new country fell short of even the most modest of expectations. Serious problems arose with food shortages, the spread of epidemic diseases, and a lack of employment and housing, and it would take years before many of these issues were dealt with adequately. One of the main reasons for this was that the refugee issue became intensely politicized due to internal divisions in Greece.

The period between 1915 and 1936 was marred by the bitter and vehement conflict between the Royalist and the Liberal camps for reasons directly related to Greece's stance as either neutral or aligned with the Entente Powers during the First World War. Although both camps were nationalistic and both subscribed to the irredentist project known as the Μεγάλη Ίδέα (Great Idea), they espoused different paths to its fulfillment and chose different partners to assist them. The gap between the two rival camps and their two leaders, Eleftherios Venizelos and King Constantine, respectively, proved so deep that the years between 1915 and 1936 are known as the period of the Εθνικός Διχασμός (National Schism) (Mavrogordatos 1983, 25–101; Clogg 1984, 105–132). The years following the Catastrophe found Greece in a state of constant political turmoil. The Greek monarchy was abolished by a military coup, and a republican regime was proclaimed without achieving political stability. The country continued to be divided between Liberals and Royalists for many years. During the 1930s, Greece continued to experience changes in government and political instability, which eventually led to the toppling of the Republic, the restoration of the monarchy in 1935, and then the Metaxas dictatorship in 1936.

Under these conditions, there was no call for commemorating the Asia Minor Catastrophe. Devastated by war, debt, and internal divisions, Greece

was in a desperate position and could not easily address the refugees' needs for food, housing, and jobs. Indeed, Greek administrations did not encourage the commemoration of the exodus from Asia Minor during the interwar period. Despite ongoing political instability, the official Greek policy towards Turkey was cautious, and the administration refrained from endorsing memorials or other public events that could provoke Turkish reactions. This was predictable given the poor state of the Greek economy and its limited military capability, as well as the prospect of Greek-Turkish *rapprochement*, which appealed to leaders with completely opposing views on almost everything else, like the Liberal, Eleftherios Venizelos, the Royalist, Panagiotis Tsaldaris, and even the extreme right-winger, Ioannis Metaxas.

It is also true that the refugees were preoccupied with the exigencies of everyday life, and bringing up the traumatic experiences of the exodus was last on a long list of pressing priorities. This, however, does not mean that the memory of 1922 was entirely repressed. As will become evident in the following discussion, the politics of the memory of the Asia Minor Catastrophe were always present, affecting both the making of a refugee identity and the dynamics of Greek politics.

The aim of this article, then, is to examine and contextualize the forms of refugee memory that developed during the interwar period. The scholarship on refugee memory in this period remains underdeveloped, despite the fact that the Asia Minor Catastrophe has received much historical attention, particularly after the 1940s. As far as issues of memory are concerned, it must be pointed out that concerted efforts were made by the Centre of Asia Minor Studies in Athens to collect individual testimonies in the 1950s and 1960s from first- and second-generation refugees about their lives in the Ottoman Empire before 1922, their experiences of dislocation and migration, and their lives after settlement in Greece.³ Memory as an analytic category, however, was not deployed by historians to analyze refugee testimonies, and so individual recollections were treated simply as sources of information without taking into account that memory is not static but always in flux. Of course, I do not suggest that issues of memory were entirely neglected, particularly in studies of refugee communities. For example, the anthropologist Renée Hirschon, who did fieldwork in the refugee settlement of Kokkinia in the 1970s, avers that the memory of refugees was a cultural asset serving as the bond between the past and the exigencies of the present (Hirschon 1998). However, one might wonder about the kind of stories refugees relayed to their children, given that by then their recollections had been mediated by the subsequent experience of settlement, the Axis occupation of Greece, the Civil War, the authoritarian post-civil war regime, and the 1967 dictatorship, to name only some of the major political developments of the twentieth century. This brings to the forefront the intriguing but sensitive issue of generational dynamics and

how contemporary political and cultural agendas inform issues of memory in the long run.

Today, the memory culture of Asia Minor in Greece is thriving (James 2001; Varlas 2003; Deltsoy 2004; Nikolopoulou 2007; Exertzoglou 2011; Tansuğ 2011; Tsimouris 2011). There is consistent reference to the “lost homelands,” a term invented in the 1960s as a metaphor for Asia Minor and its constituent parts. This term refers to a memory culture accommodating both nostalgia for the “lost homelands” and the revisiting of the trauma of exodus by later generations of refugees. This form of nostalgia accommodates both conciliatory and explicitly anti-Turkish overtones directly associated with the current political tensions between Greece and Turkey.⁴ The Greek Parliament in 1994 and again in 1998 officially recognized the events of 1919–1922 as genocide and requested that other countries and international bodies join them in doing so, but so far few have.

This article focuses particularly on the ways in which the memory of the Catastrophe was cast into meaningful narratives directly connected to strategies of integration and, therefore, treats memory as a dynamic aspect of refugee identity. My discussion is limited to the first-generation refugees and does not extend to the generational dynamics that affected the transformation of the memory culture of Asia Minor later on.

This discussion of the memory of the Catastrophe raises the interrelated issues of refugee memory and refugee identity. The arrival of 1.5 million refugees profoundly impacted Greek society and culture, and it generated new tensions in a political landscape already riven by deep divisions. The refugee vote, for example, proved decisive in every general and local election during the interwar period, tilting the balance in favor of the Liberal Party and against the Royalists, whom most refugees held responsible for the Catastrophe. Voting for the Liberals earned the refugees the open hostility of the Royalists. In addition, the different cultural and linguistic practices of the refugees created new cultural and material spaces within the new homeland that often caused tensions with so-called indigenous Greeks. Many of them confronted the refugees with suspicion, if not open hostility, blaming them for all the country’s problems, totally forgetting that the refugee exodus from Asia Minor was the direct outcome of Greece’s failed irredentist policy. In this context, the integration of the refugees in interwar Greece proved both difficult and complicated, involving material demands but also the prospect of cultural and political reform.

For their part, refugees complained about the poor material conditions in which they lived, the mismanagement of their affairs and property rights, and their exclusion from positions of power. They frequently expressed their disappointment that these issues were not being addressed. However, the refugees were themselves not a monolithic group, despite the fact that they voted *en bloc* for the Liberals. On the contrary, there were many social and cultural

differences among the various urban and rural refugee communities. Most refugees shared common experiences of the exodus from Asia Minor and the less-than-ideal living conditions in the settlements in Greece, but they also clung to their local identities, which provided security and recognition in what one could call an almost foreign environment. Therefore, an array of local refugee identities coexisted in tension with the more homogenizing identity that was emerging through the contested process of integration.

Refugee memory defies easy generalizations. The refugees were not a coherent group, nor were their experiences of the exodus uniform. Some suffered much more than others, and everyone experienced the Catastrophe differently depending on their individual circumstances. In addition, peoples' memories were not fixed, but rather changed over time. Individuals tend to remember or forget in relation to the changing patterns of their lives, and what they remember of the past is modified accordingly (Lebow Neb, Kansteiner, and Fogu 2006). Memory, traumatic or not, is a work in progress, always unstable and in the process of transformation under the influence of subsequent events.⁵ Accordingly, there were different registers of refugee memory.

On the one hand, there were refugees with traumatic experiences who did not have the chance or the will to narrate them.⁶ In general, individuals' painful experiences remained untold to the general public. On the other, it is difficult to qualify the psychological and cultural framework within which the refugees made sense of their experiences. The bulk of them were illiterate, and many had poor or no knowledge of Greek, their mother tongue being Turkish. Besides, what the refugees actually remembered was their bitter individual experiences, which could not explain or illuminate the reasons for their misfortune. I do not suggest that these refugees were incapable of telling their stories, but rather simply that their stories were limited in scope, not to mention that, if told at all, they were recounted within families in private.

Against this background of separate, individual, and private oral memories appeared a kind of transcendental public memory, which I call *institutional refugee memory*. I adopt this term in my analysis as a useful category to help in understanding the reconfiguration of interwar refugee identity (Lebow Ned, Kansteiner, and Fogu 2006). Institutional refugee memory was associated with certain kinds of public narratives about the recent past. These were available for public use and embedded in the public discourse by the refugee press and by the communications of refugee associations. In addition, this kind of memory was directly implicated in other narratives and practices that were not simply commemorative but also addressed the exigencies of the present and the uncertain integration of the refugees in their new country.

The institutional memory of Asia Minor established a framework of remembrance that put a transcendental, coherent subject—the refugee—into sharp relief and raised claims on its behalf. In this framework, individual

suffering made sense only in relation to broader contexts. The articulation of this kind of memory required a level of abstraction above the individual memory of suffering and identity and in a sense distinct from them. I am not suggesting that the institutional memory supplanted individual memories entirely, nor that the institutional and private forms of memory were in opposition.⁷ They were not identical because they worked on different scales, one public and the other private, but they also interacted. That was because in order to have validity the institutional memory, in whatever form, had to be broadly consistent with the individual memories and experiences of all those who were involved in the events of the Catastrophe. But this interaction between public and private memory did not take place for the sake of memory alone. It is my contention that some forms of institutional memory contextualized the Asia Minor Catastrophe in terms of the prospect of furthering refugee integration, and, in this respect, memory construction was coordinated with other refugee activities.

A key issue in this discussion is who spoke for the refugees and, therefore, who were the framers of the institutional memory of Asia Minor. Despite their numerical strength, the refugees did not form a political party of their own and thus had no official representatives. There was, however, an extended group of mostly male, educated refugees who were involved in refugee affairs in different capacities. This group of refugees—MPs, teachers, doctors, lawyers, journalists, artists, and businessmen—was not coherent, although most of its members had strong Liberal sympathies. Politicians like Leonidas Iasonides and Stavros Nikolaides, priests like Anthimos Papadopoulos and Crysanthos, Archbishop of Trapezounda, journalists like Solon Solomonides, Kostas Misailides, and Yiorgo Asketopoulos, and educators like Dimitri Economides spoke on behalf of the refugees on many occasions. The public voices of educated refugees were important because these people were in a position to articulate demands that shaped the fate of the refugees. Although these voices were not identical to one another, they represented a source of authority and power and, at the same time, created a space for mediation between the mass of the refugees and the Greek state and its political system.

This public voice of refugees was not, however, simply a matter of the individual voices of prominent refugees. There were various networks of refugee sociality that created a public space which was in tension with state policies. Important among these was the large network of refugee clubs and associations established in Greece during the 1920s and 1930s. These accommodated local and more general refugee demands and provided a space for refugee sociality. These clubs and associations, like the Society of Pontic Studies, the Union of Smyrniots, and many others, were mostly involved in cultural, educational, and athletic activities, while also providing a space for discussing issues of major interest relating to the demands of the refugee population. Of equal importance

was the refugee press, which included various newspapers, with *Prosfygikē Phonē* (Refugee voice) and *Prosfygikos Kosmos* (Refugee world) being the best known. Published in Athens and in other places, these papers were major vehicles for expressing the refugees' claims *vis-à-vis* the state. Within this extensive institutional network, the memory of Asia Minor and of the Catastrophe was discussed, reshaped, transformed, and institutionalized.

The institutional memory of Asia Minor was a discursive field that involved not only the voices of the refugees but also those of non-refugees, including politicians, journalists, state officials, intellectuals, philanthropists, and others who addressed the events of the Catastrophe and of the Asia Minor campaign on numerous occasions. It could not be otherwise, considering the vast impact these events had had on Greek society. The memory of Asia Minor did not belong exclusively to the refugees; rather, it was shaped and reshaped within a broader discursive and cultural framework involving different voices and accommodating different intentions, which, as we will see, proved of major importance to the political conflicts of the interwar period.

The institutional memory of Asia Minor authorized different narratives of the Catastrophe that made reference to the tragic events of the last episodes of the Greek-Turkish war and the suffering of expulsion and forced migration. In fact, it is possible to discern two overlapping but different narrative patterns within which the institutional memory of the Asia Minor Catastrophe was cast. The first narrative pattern focused on victimhood, emplotting the sufferings of Christians at the hands of the Turks and using particular examples as cases in point. The second pattern did not suppress the memory of death and destruction, but it was forward-looking, in search of a positive identity for the refugee more fitting to the demands of social integration. Both versions suppressed the heterogeneity of the Ottoman Christians who became refugees, favoring instead their equal membership in the undifferentiated and united body of the Greek nation.

I call the first pattern the narrative of victimization. There are very few public testimonies of this kind in the period under consideration. Most of these testimonies, moreover, do not present the voice of the refugees themselves but instead are mediated versions, shaped by those who collected and edited them. A major example of these narratives is the collection of stories by refugee girls published in 1925 by the Women's International Association, a philanthropic society running a boarding school in Athens for refugee girls (*Αυτοβιογραφίες προσφύγων κοριτσιών* [Autobiographies of refugee girls] 1925; hereafter, APK 1925). The edited volume consists of 20 testimonies, all written in the first person, of girls from various areas of Asia Minor. They describe the violence of the Turkish soldiers; the loss of their family members; the travails of their arduous escape; their rescue by the boats that transported them to Greece; and, finally, their admission and experiences at the boarding school. Excerpts

from three narrations by girls living in Smyrna at the time of the Catastrophe demonstrate my point.

Amphyline Hatzimarkou told of the happiness and safety that she and her family felt during the three-year occupation of Smyrna by the Greek army and acknowledged that no one ever envisioned the army's defeat and disastrous retreat. Amphyline recalls that when the Turks suddenly entered Smyrna: "Our father went to his shop as he did every day. Two hours later one of his clerks ran in our house and told us the breaking news, 'My lady the Turks are here. Save the children.' My mother was so astonished to hear this that she fainted. . . . We rushed towards the shore to catch one of the ships to carry us across to the islands. . . . The Turks put severe obstacles to Christians asking for papers and documentation and taking bribes. Father went to the Governor's office to get a document with the help of a Turkish lawyer but they kept him there. . . . We left Smyrna leaving behind father and all our property. Father never joined us in Athens" (APK 1925, 11–12).

According to another witness, Evgenia Digeni: "On September 2 Smyrna was on fire. . . . When the fire reached the house we left and found rescue in the nearby school where we thought we would be safe. Just as we got there we heard gunfire . . . the Turks did not put out the fire but fueled it with gasoline. So we abandoned our refuge and ran to the shore only to find out that the fire was already there. The horror in the streets was beyond description. The Turks were running, torturing us and taking everything of value. They slaughtered people in front of our eyes. . . . They also took all the men they found into custody. And we were unable to hide [our] father from them. We paid many liras to get forged French papers and boarded one of the ships but father was left behind and lost" (APK 1925, 19–22).

Virginia Apergi offered a similar account. Virginia was born in Smyrna in 1907 into a merchant family. According to her narrative, her family life was happy and untroubled, and she remembered the palpable joy she felt when the Greek army entered the Port of Smyrna to establish the new Greek administration. As the fortunes of war turned against the Greeks and the Turkish forces reached Smyrna, fear spread throughout the Christian population. "During the first day of the [Turkish] occupation we kept ourselves in the house . . . when the fire reached our homes we were forced to leave taking with us only few valuable things . . . we rushed to the streets and found refuge in the cemetery, in the family tomb. Then we left for the Quay in the hope that we will be shipped away and save our lives. It was then that my troubles began. A wild Turk snatched my brother and my mother was lost in the crowd [as she probably followed the Turk to get her child back]. The pain I felt as the ship carried us away from Smyrna without my mother and brother is beyond words" (APK 1925, 23–24).

All the girls' testimonies are of a similar nature. Their horror at the loss of family members, displacement, and resettlement in an unknown country,

as well as their gratitude to the ladies of the board of the school are common themes in these narratives, which connect trauma and salvation. These accounts seem to follow the same narrative pattern. They all describe a happy and prosperous family life before the war, then signal a turning point—some mention the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, others the outbreak of the First World War or the occupation of Smyrna/Izmir by Greek troops—and, finally, they focus on the dramatic period when the actors/narrators had to leave their homes and run for safety. It is at this final stage that the voice of the witness changes from “we,” usually referring to the family, into “I,” the victim herself. The narrative symmetry of these stories points to their constructed or filtered nature. Although these stories were collected soon after the girls’ arrival in Greece, their final versions were probably structured in such a way as to follow a coherent, common narrative pattern. This is not to deny that the girls actually experienced violence, displacement, and loss, but rather to suggest that their stories originally must have been more chaotic and disrupted than the final printed versions. Most likely, the individual experiences of these girls reinforced one another, and their narrativization took a more definite and coherent shape in the boarding school with the help of the ladies who ran it. This last point seems obvious if one reads the volume’s short introduction, in which the principal of the school states that the girls were asked to tell their stories as a part of therapy and as a way of highlighting the work of the school for the “public of the philanthropists” (APK 1925, 7).

Victims of violence often concentrate on what happened to them, expressing their anguish, fear, and despair, without taking much care to explain the historical conditions and causes of their experiences. In the cases mentioned above, the narratives focus on individual experience, but there is also reference to the kind of common knowledge that was available to most Orthodox Christians at the time, such the trope of the wild Turk or the joy most Christians felt about the Greek occupation. However, the experience of violence is almost impossible to explain entirely without the suggestive mediation of those who asked the girls to tell their stories and then published them as coherent and self-contained narrations. Although there is no concrete evidence to suggest deliberate manipulation of the girls’ stories, the repetition of themes, language, and tropes raises concerns that some homogenizing mechanisms were at play. Of course, because reason and emotion are neither separated by a rigid line nor mutually exclusive, I do not claim that the original utterance of these stories was entirely based on emotion and that they are therefore inherently incoherent. I do suggest, however, that the recognition of experience as meaningful evidence on a level of abstraction above the suffering individual—a level on which these stories speak—requires a kind of suggestive mediation that would turn the experience into a story. This process became possible through the venues of other public discourses that provided narrative patterns and

homogenized experience, without which individual remembrance remained elusive.⁸

Similar stories highlighting the victimhood of the refugees were also published in the press. An interesting case is presented by the accounts from the Vilayet of Izmit that the journalist and war correspondent Kostas Misailides collected and published in 1928. According to one account, a certain Gavur Ali entered the village of Houndi, summoned the Christian inhabitants to the church, and asked them to bring all their money. Then, he asked the local priest to conduct the service with all the inhabitants present. After the service, “Gavur Ali forced the priest to lead his flock outside the village and in the meadows where ‘his killers’ were waiting. There he killed the priest with his knife and said to the Christians, ‘Now let us see if your God can help you.’ Then he gave a command to his men to slaughter all the Christians left in the village and all of them died in agony” (Misailides 1928). This horrific story was associated with a concrete historical narrative. According to the account, Gavur Ali did not act alone but in coordination with Ottoman officials, who used him and others like him to exterminate Christians.

The accuracy of these stories is not of concern here. What is most noteworthy for my purposes is that the testimonies of the refugees were cast in a language that explained a series of terrible events in terms of specific intentions on the part of the Turks. The plot was easy to follow, as was the position of the actors: Christians were the victims, Turks the victimizers. The two groups occupied two unbridgeable subject positions and two opposite natures with no grey area between them. We are not in a position to know how Misailides collected these accounts; nor do we know even if these were actually real eyewitness accounts, let alone if or how he modified them. I say this because in this particular example no Christians seems to have been left alive to tell the story, which suggests the likelihood that this is a secondhand account that Misailides turned into a third-person narrative. This is not to question the factuality of these events; I simply point to a narrative structure that grants coherence to the raw material of individual testimonies.

This collection of refugee accounts, which Misailides published in the *Ephēmeris tes Anatoles* (Journal of the Orient), as well as the stories of the refugee girls seem to be exemplary of a kind of institutionalized narrative that casts individual experiences of violence and loss into meaningful stories framed by victimhood. Narratives such as these portrayed the refugees as victims, incapable of reacting to their misfortune, almost devoid of agency, and—if misconceptions were not ruled out—a financial and cultural burden on Greek society generally. In this respect, the victimization story provided one pattern for narrating the Catastrophe as the sum total of individual experiences, but it proved inadequate as a mechanism for articulating refugees’ demands and aspirations. The image of the refugee as victim and possibly as a burden in the

rebuilding of the Greek society after 1922 was counterproductive regarding strategies for social integration. These strategies required alternative narratives that—without suppressing the victimization of the refugees and the memory of Catastrophe—would provide a positive refugee identity, compatible with the demands of integration and the changing social and political circumstances in Greece. This narrative of empowerment was forward-looking and focused on the qualities of refugees as intelligent, tenacious, and hardworking members of the Greek nation. In contrast to the narrative of victimization that limited itself to descriptions of atrocities, the narrative of empowerment portrayed the refugees in a positive light, depicting them as the saviors of a decadent society. In this context, a discursive space was created where the refugees saw and proclaimed themselves to be the redeemers of a Greek society that had lost its way.

In fact, the redemption of Greek society had been a major component of the narrative of empowerment since the 1920s. Refugee newspapers published many articles arguing that the arrival of the refugees was a great boost for the Greek economy and society. The refugees brought money for investments, productive skills necessary for industry and agriculture, and, above all, numbers that increased considerably the Hellenic composition of Greece's population, particularly in the Northern provinces (*Pampsofsygiķē* [Refugee post] 1925; Pallis 1929; Katakouzinis 1933).

What is more interesting, though, is that this emphasis on the positive impact of the refugees was often combined with a view of Greek society as decadent and in need of restoration. On one occasion, for example, the *Prosfygikos Kosmos* stated that the patriotic sentiment of the refugees was stronger than that of the “indigenous” Greeks because the refugees had lived “under bondage” and therefore could fully appreciate the value of “freedom”; it was this particular sentiment that prompted the refugees to serve the national interest even at their own expense, thus becoming a reliable and irreplaceable element in “the regeneration of Greece” (*Prosfygikos Kosmos* 1934a). This argument became widespread and was repeated in numerous refugee publications that pointed to the National Schism as the major symptom of national decadence without, paradoxically, mentioning the strong Liberal affiliations of the refugees and their eventual involvement in the political struggle.

Up to this point, I have suggested that there were two different narratives that shaped the refugee institutional memory of Asia Minor, and I have argued that the narrative of empowerment was more relevant to refugees' strategies for integration. The two narratives of victimization and empowerment overlapped, but they also differed in that they constructed refugee experience and prospects in opposite ways. More important, however, is the interplay of these narratives with the overarching narratives of Greek irredentism and the political conflicts

in Greece that could not remove the memory of the Catastrophe from consideration. Simply put, the memory of Asia Minor was not monopolized by the refugees. The Asia Minor Catastrophe was associated with the institutional memory of the refugees and their claims for integration; at the same time, it was subsumed into the narratives of the Megali Idea and the National Schism as a key episode in a long series of events that sealed the fate of Hellenism and the Greek nation-state. As part of the National Schism, the Catastrophe was politicized and lost its narrative autonomy as an event associated strictly with the refugees. This did not mean that refugees lost control of this narrative. On the contrary, the narrative of empowerment was used to highlight a transcendental refugee identity as an integral part of the Greek nation. But this identity was ineluctably associated with the field of Greek politics, where the memorialization of the Asia Minor Catastrophe emerged as a key point of contention. This is the issue to which I turn now.

The reader should bear in mind that there were constant changes in Greece affecting the memorialization of Asia Minor. In the late 1920s, in contrast to the two or three years that immediately followed the Catastrophe, there was a major turn in Greek politics as far as relations with the new Turkish Republic were concerned. After 1928, a policy of *rapprochement* was pursued. In 1930, the Liberal government signed a treaty with Turkey that arranged various matters relating to the population exchange, but signing this accord cost the Liberals in the following elections because the treaty alienated the refugee vote. Friendly relations with the Republic of Turkey became the motto of all subsequent administrations, Liberal or Royalist. The authoritarian regime of Ioannis Metaxas, which took power in August 1936, followed this policy with even more zeal. The treaty with Turkey was a pragmatic step taken during years of economic recession, a gesture towards reaching a final settlement with Greece's supposed archenemy in recognition that the country's reconstruction was impossible in a quasi-state of war. In addition, Greece's economic recovery was a crucial precondition for refugee integration. Despite unbridgeable differences on most issues, both political factions seemed by the mid-1930s to have come to accept that the defeat of Greece was final. However, the political conflict in Greece remained tough and unpredictable, given the deep division in Greek society.

During this period of tension, the refugee vote became an apple of discord. As mentioned above, the refugees voted massively for the Liberals, but in 1932 some of their votes went to other parties, even to Royalist-Populist candidates (Karavas 1992; see also Mavrogordatos 1983, 28–54). This shift in voting is partly explained by the Liberal administration's failure to live up to the expectations of the refugees, particularly in regard to property-related issues. The power struggle between Royalists and Liberals intensified after the 1932 elections and the fall of the Venizelos administration,⁹ and the refugee vote

was eagerly sought after at this particular conjuncture. However, this constituency could not be swayed only by issues such as refugee relocation, financial compensation, housing, and the like. The Asia Minor Catastrophe was involved in all discourses addressing the refugees as a means of reminding them of the responsibilities of the two main political parties. Therefore, the memory of Asia Minor and the narratives of the Catastrophe were reworked within this period (1928–1936) to influence the refugee vote. Here, of course, the Liberals had the advantage because the bulk of the refugees shared the Liberal narrative of the Catastrophe that put all the blame on the Royalists.

During the 1930s, the memory of Asia Minor loomed large in the National Schism. This memory was instrumentalized and dissociated from the trauma of expulsion and individual suffering, being associated instead with specific claims relevant to the exigencies of integration. Two specific examples discussed in what follows are cases in point; namely, the 1933 general elections and the dispute over the monument to the six Royalist leaders executed in November 1922 for their role in the Catastrophe.

In 1933, Greece remained in a critical state. General elections were announced for 5 May, and the Liberal and Populist coalitions were desperately fighting for votes, refugee votes in particular. The pro-Royalist Popular Party appealed time and again to the refugees, hoping to win their support, which they needed if they were to regain power. What is interesting here is the way populist candidates addressed the refugee public. For example, Nikos Kraniotakis argued on 4 March 1933 that the refugees did not advance their cause by voting for the Liberals, asking them instead to change course and vote for the Popular Party. Kraniotakis did not simply address the refugees on contemporary issues; he also couched his call in a historical narrative that went back in 1914 and ended on the eve of the 1932 elections. The Liberals, Kraniotakis claimed, did not really care about the refugees. As evidence of this he adduced the fact that as early as 1914 it was, in fact, Venizelos who first suggested the compulsory exchange of populations. He then pointed out that it was the Liberals who had sabotaged the war effort while in opposition in 1920 and who finally undermined all rightful refugee demands with regard to their property rights and compensation. He also blamed the Liberals for instigating animosity among the refugees against the Populists by spreading rumors that the latter had burned refugee settlements (Kraniotakis 1933a). A few days before the elections, *Vradynē* (Evening post) accused the Liberals of being responsible for all the misfortunes that had befallen Greece since 1914, including, of course, the Asia Minor debacle. Venizelos was blamed for Greece's involvement in the First World War on the side of the Allies, the Ukrainian campaign, the Asia Minor adventure, and the signing of the Lausanne Treaty (Kraniotakis 1933b). In a speech by a Populist candidate, Venizelos was styled "Minotaurus" and held responsible for the war campaigns that since 1914 had "drained the Greek

youth without serving the interests of the nations but those of foreign powers instead.” Again, the Asia Minor campaign was directly linked to the “devious plans” of Venizelos that led to the destruction of “Hellenism in Asia Minor” and the “deprivation of the refugees” (*Akropolis* [Acropolis] 1933).

Theodore Alexandrou, who presented himself as representing “the Greeks of Attaleia,” made a public declaration to the refugees, blaming them for the Liberal electoral victories in the past. Claiming that the Liberal administrations had not lived up to their promises, he asked the refugees to abandon Venizelos because he was responsible for all their misfortunes, and he urged them to vote for the opposition (*Proia* [Morning post] 1933). General Kostas Petmezas, organizer of the Manissa militia in Asia Minor, exhorted the refugees to abandon the Liberals and vote for the Populists. Presenting himself as a father counseling his children, Petmezas repeated the Royalist narrative according to which the Catastrophe and the consequent loss of thousands of Christians was the result of Liberal policies (Petmezas 1933).

These were some of the calls to the refugees published in the Royalist-Populist press, directly targeting their vote through reference to the memory of Asia Minor. Interestingly, during the electoral campaign, the Populist Party promised a particularly gratifying measure to the refugees: the payment to all eligible refugees of 25% of the sum of their compensation that had been withheld by the National Bank of Greece (Mavrogordatos 1983, 190). Shortage of money had prevented the payment of this sum, and the issue seemed to be a dead letter until the Populists put it back on table, promising that they could pay the refugees without depleting the Treasury. It is fair to suggest that the Populists feared that the proposal for the return of the 25% was not enough in itself to mobilize at least part of the refugee vote in their favor, and it was for this reason that they vigorously projected their own narrative for the Asia Minor campaign simultaneously. The Populists addressed the refugees in these terms because they believed that winning the refugee vote was conditional on the party’s presentation of a historical narrative that would explain the refugees’ past and present misfortunes and connect these misfortunes to the Liberal party. In the Populists’ discourse, the refugees were likened to immature individuals enchanted by the Liberal narrative, blinded by false promises, and almost incapable of grasping the truth and following the correct path. The time had come, they argued, for the refugees to disentangle themselves from emotional memories, change their attitude, and behave responsibly. In this way, they distinguished the refugees from indigenous Greeks, who purportedly were not seduced by Liberal rhetoric and lies.

Liberals reacted vehemently. They rejected the proposal for the repayment of the 25% compensation and repeated their own version of the 1922 events. Liberal newspapers reported, albeit somewhat excessively, on the enthusiasm with which the refugees greeted Liberal candidates when they visited refugee

settlements (*Phonē tou Laou* [Voice of the people] 1933a; *Patris* [Fatherland] 1933). A large number of refugee associations steadfastly supported the Liberals, stating that no Populist trick could ever separate them from the party. Emphasis on refugee identity and its distinct association with the memory of Asia Minor was often brought to the fore. According to one Liberal paper, the abyss dividing the refugees from the Populists was embedded in refugee popular lore. As one source put it:

The Refugees remember the national crimes of the Popular Party, the destruction of the victorious Greek Army in the abortive campaign of the Saggaria River and the elimination of thousands of families [by the Turks] as a result. The Popular Party abandoned the defense of Smyrna and did not allow the timely removal of the Greeks to safety. The refugees will always remember these crimes. (*Phonē tou Laou* 1933c)

The emphasis on remembering was not accidental. Reminding the refugees that the King and the Popular Party were to blame for their plight was essential to the narrative that linked refugee identity to the Liberal party. Not surprisingly, the Liberals projected the image of Venizelos as the liberator of the “Greeks under bondage” at political rallies organized on the islands of Chios and Samos, both annexed by Greece in the Balkan wars (*Phonē tou Laou* 1933b). Venizelos visited the islands, and in his speech he presented his followers with a historical narrative that elaborated the Liberal plans for the Great Idea, justified his decision to join the Allied side during the First World War as a measure to protect the Ottoman Greeks from Turkish persecutions, and stated his belief that his removal from power in November 1920 and the subsequent change in the conduct of military and political affairs by the Royalist administration were responsible for the Catastrophe (*Phonē tou Laou* 1933b). The refugee newspapers were even more aggressive. *Prosfygikos Kosmos* rejected the proposal of the return of the 25% compensation as a pathetic ruse and warned the Popular Party:

We the refugees are tolerant to the point of forgetting those who are responsible for our destruction because we wanted to safeguard the interests of our country. We also set aside the offensive words like “Turkish seeds,” “Gypsy hordes,” and “pillagers of the Treasury,” which [the Populists] use when addressing us. We choose to forget [all these] although they went as far as to question our national consciousness requesting that we vote on different registers. But we will never accept being treated as complete idiots to the point of self-deception with such cheap tricks. (*Prosfygikos Kosmos* 1933)

One of the crucial issues of the interwar period was assigning blame for Greece’s humiliating defeat in the war and the subsequent Catastrophe. Although both sides were involved in the conduct of the Asia Minor campaign, the guilt officially fell on a small group of Royalist military and political

officials who were tried by a military tribunal. Six of them were found guilty of treason and executed in November 1922. The executions did not soothe public outcry or diminish the political split in the country. On the contrary, the executions provided a source of constant tension, and, eventually, the issue became entangled with the memorialization of Asia Minor. The dispute over the memorial of the six executed Royalists is a case in point.

On 16 November 1934, George Vlachos, editor of the daily *Kathimerinē* (Daily post), proposed the construction of a small memorial temple in the place where the six political and military leaders had been executed (*Kathimerinē* 1934). Supporters of the Popular Party, as well as even some Liberals, believed that the death penalty had not been justified and that the sentence was politically motivated by the explicit goal of holding specific Royalists—and by extension the King himself—responsible for the Catastrophe. A segment of the pro-Royalist press insisted that the execution of the Six was a prearranged crime motivated by the hatred of the Liberal Party and of Venizelos himself for the King and the leadership of the Populists. Hence, Venizelos and the Liberals were often referred to as murderers and criminals.

Vlachos's proposal was not accidental. A few days before he made it, a group of Royalists accused of attempting to assassinate Venizelos and his wife in November 1933 were brought to trial, aggravating an already tense situation and giving rise to inflammatory articles in the press. Vlachos did not even attempt to hide his intention for the monument to serve as a rallying point for the Royalists. Obviously, the commemoration of this event was meant as a provocation in the ongoing political struggle between Liberals and Populists, but it would have received no further attention had Stamatis Chatzibeis, a Liberal member of parliament, not called for the construction of another monument to commemorate the officers, soldiers, and civilians who died during the Asia Minor campaign. At first sight, the two monuments did not seem to be in conflict, except for their size and budget.¹⁰ However, the two proposals projected a completely different version of the memory of the Asia Minor Catastrophe. Chatzibeis claimed that his proposal would do justice to “the officers and privates who died in vain in the war [but also] to the hundreds of thousands of the unburied and unlamented fathers, brothers and relatives, victims of the criminal and foolish acts of the post-November administrations” (*Patris* 1934). With the term “post-November administrations,” Chatzibeis was referring to the Royalist administrations responsible for the Asia Minor campaign after the electoral defeat of the Liberals in 1920. The Royalists won these elections by promising an end to the war to an electorate already exhausted by a decade of constant warfare, but they did not live up to their promise and even expanded military operations against the Turkish nationalist forces for two more years until the collapse of the front in August 1922. It is striking that Chatzibeis held the Royalist administration responsible not only for the military defeat but

also for the civilian deaths caused by the war and the atrocities committed by Kemalist forces, which, however, he did not mention directly.

As expected, Vlachos replied in very strong language. In a long leading article, he put the whole period of the Catastrophe into a totally different perspective, arguing that the Royalist government was forced to continue fighting in Asia Minor as the only means of protecting the Christians from the wrath of the Turks. But the war itself was the choice of the Liberal administration, which, in addition, he held culpable for purging the officers' corps of all men with Royalist sympathies. What the Royalist government did was to rehabilitate these officers as "these tragic heroes" and to mobilize them in an unwanted war. Therefore, Vlachos argued, the Royalists died by the thousands in Asia Minor in vain, in support of a struggle that was not theirs (Vlachos 1934).

Nikos Efstratiou, the editor of the ultra-Royalist daily, *Hellenikon Mellon* (Greek future), responded to Chatzibeis with the same vehemence as Vlachos had. Not only did he support the call for the construction of the temple, but he added that another monument should be constructed to the memory of King Constantine, who had died in January 1923 in exile and remained "unburied in a foreign land" (Efstratiou 1934; *Hellenikon Mellon* 1934). According to Efstratiou, these monuments would be the answer to the provocation of the Liberals and their "criminal" leader. In this case, the Catastrophe was simply a subplot in a narrative whose central theme was the conflict between Royalists and Liberals. As a consequence, in this context, the Asia Minor monument was simply an episode serving as a counterproposal to the Royalist narrative that discarded the Asia Minor Catastrophe altogether and focused on the executions in the Goudi Park. Chatzibeis's accusations were part of the Liberal account that accused the Royalist side of extending the war, of avoiding negotiations for an honorable peace, and of completely misjudging the military and political situation. Nikos Efstratiou deployed the same argument in reverse. In the Royalist narrative he recited, it was the Liberals who had led a badly prepared country for an unwise war—and who had left no other option for the new Royalist government in 1920 than to continue the fighting. According to this narrative, the Liberal officers who still served with the Greek army were held accountable for the military defeat because they disobeyed superior officers who belonged to a different political faction.

The extent and nature of the controversy was such that it could not go unnoticed by the refugee papers. *Prosfygikos Kosmos* joined the dispute, taking the side of Chatzibeis and the Liberals. This was anticipated due to the strong Liberal sympathies of many refugees. More interesting is the fact that the *Kosmos* accused Vlachos and the Royalists of taking the memory of Asia Minor off the slate of national commemorations, preferring instead to focus on an event serving only partisan purposes:

What can we make of this suggestion? Are we [the refugees] still counted among the Bulgarians or the Turks and not among the Greeks? Because this is exactly what monsieur Vlachos seems to be insinuating. But maybe there is simply his hatred for the refugees because their vote deprived his party of victory in the elections for many years. . . . His hatred blocks his reason making him incapable of recognizing that in Asia Minor the Greeks fought and died united without party discrimination. But along with the soldiers hundreds of thousands of civilians also died. Our fathers, our mothers, our brothers and sisters were dishonored, enslaved and murdered by the Greek state which obstructed their timely removal from Asia Minor sending none of the available ships harbored in nearby ports to rescue them, leaving them unprotected on the Smyrna quay. (*Prosfygikos Kosmos* 1934b)

The *Kosmos* referred to the lack of will on the part of the Royalist military and political administration to evacuate the refugees, suggesting that they were as responsible as the Turks for the murders and misfortunes of the Christian population. But although the presence of the so-called martyrs is evident here, the refugees were subsumed under the metanarrative of the National Schism. The memory of the dead was mentioned as an appendix to the major claim of the paper: the integration of the refugees into Greek society. No wonder, then, that one of the following leading articles published by the paper purposely avoided the mongering of the dead, focusing instead on current social issues, specifically the situation of the refugees. The *Kosmos* lamented the poor living conditions in the refugee settlements in Athens and elsewhere, blaming the state for their plight. "It is time for the authorities to remember the refugees and the conditions they live in. Because the refugees never stop remembering the miserable lives they now live [in Greece]. If it [the state] does not want to commemorate the memory of our dead let it take care now of the refugees and their needs" (*Prosfygikos Kosmos* 1934c). In this case, memory was seen as part of the everyday experience of the refugees, a reminder of the collapse of their social lives that was, as the paper suggested, the outcome of their incomplete integration.

The two cases presented above allow us to understand the negotiation of refugee identity in the context of Greek politics during the short period following the Catastrophe. The memorialization of Asia Minor was part of the intense and bitter political conflict in Greece and a critical factor in the making of the Greek refugee identity. For the Populists, the refugees were immature citizens under the spell of the Liberals; for the Liberals, the choice of the refugees to support them was the outcome of their having been betrayed by the Royalists.

Therefore, there is good reason to suggest that during the 1930s the memorialization of Asia Minor constituted a complicated discursive field that involved many different voices and groups with widely divergent goals. The memorialization cannot, therefore, be limited to the refugees themselves, but rather must be connected to the broader refiguring of the Greek political

conflict. The image of the refugee was always associated with memory, either in the form of the immature individual who could not escape the lure of the Liberal narrative and see their true interest or, alternatively, in the form of the individual with the duty to remember betrayal and abandonment. Betrayal is, as we know, a strong motive to remember. The refugees themselves appropriated their image as children of memory in order to negotiate their integration into Greek society. The narrative of victimization and the narrative of empowerment accommodated memory and politics, though they did so with different emphases. However, there was always the sense that the gradual strengthening of the narrative of empowerment was more relevant to the politics of integration, despite the fact that it did not address the traumatic and existential aspects of the memory of Asia Minor. The refugee narratives did not claim a position of their own but were coordinated with the overarching narrative of the National Schism. The Catastrophe as a major mnemonic event was the catalyst for instigating passionate reactions, some more sympathetic towards the refugees than others. But neither refugee narrative ever reached the level of a main plot in itself. These narratives deprived people of any autonomous spaces in which they could present their traumatic experiences. Traumatic experience as such was meaningful only to individual victims, insufficient to form a coherent narrative explaining the causes of the Catastrophe unless it was drawn into the major narrative patterns of the National Schism.

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NOTES

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¹ There is a long debate on the naming of Orthodox Christians living in the Ottoman territories during the last century of Ottoman rule. Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire affected radically local identities that earlier had mostly been articulated around religion and locality. The effect was far more drastic on the population of Ottoman Christians, which in the nineteenth century was scattered throughout various ethno-national groups (Greeks, Bulgarians, Serbs) and nation-states. The onslaught of nationalism, however, did not affect all Ottoman Christians in the same way, and some were not affected at all. There is always some ambiguity as to how to name identities and populations in the context of rapid transformation. In this article, I use the terms “Greeks,” “Ottoman Christians,” and “Orthodox Christians” interchangeably, although I recognize the different significations that these terms still bear.

²This statement requires qualification. The allied nation-states—Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bulgaria—that fought the First Balkan War against the Ottoman Empire used ethnic cleansing extensively to force Muslim populations out of Macedonia and Thrace. The Ottomans retaliated by relocating thousands of Christians living near the frontlines to areas far away as a so-called precautionary military measure. The Second Balkan War was fought between the former allies, as Greece, Romania, Montenegro, and Serbia, on one side, and Bulgaria, on the other, struggled for control of Macedonia. During the fighting, many atrocities were committed against civilians by all sides (Carnegie International Commission 1993). The First World War proved especially distressful for many Christians in the Ottoman lands, particularly the Armenians, whose mass relocation in 1915 ended with the murder of hundreds of thousands. The Armenian genocide is still a controversial issue because the Turkish state and a large number of Turkish and other historians, particularly Americans, deny that this ever happened, insisting that the fate of the Armenians was the outcome of civil war, presumably between Muslims and Armenians (Akçam 2004; Göçek 2006; Tuğal 2007; Neizi 2008; Kayali 2009).

³This huge project was instigated by Melpo Merlie, the Director of the Centre, and was the outcome of the laborious work of a handful of researchers who did fieldwork for extensive periods of time. These researchers searched for individual refugees originating from preselected Orthodox communities with the purpose of retrieving information. However, the interviews with the refugees followed strict rules and a specific questionnaire. The Centre's procedures for collecting information institutionalized individual refugee witnesses to the Asia Minor Catastrophe as subjects for memory work (Papailias 2005, 93–138).

⁴In the last 10 to 15 years, the growing memory culture of “lost homelands,” with specific emphasis on Asia Minor, is attested by articles in the periodical and daily press, historical novels, cookbooks, TV programs and documentaries, and organized tourist trips, as well as various cultural events, such as music festivals and theater performances hosted in Greece and Turkey, not to mention the extensive number of refugee associations in every major or minor city in Greece. Most refugee associations today focus on the bitter aspects of the Greek-Turkish war and consider the persecutions and the final expulsion of Orthodox Christians from what was to become the Republic of Turkey as a form of genocide, similar to the Armenian genocide of 1915. What is especially interesting and requires further study is the way this specific claim combines with other, less politicized aspects of the memory culture of the “lost homelands” (Exertzoglou 2001).

⁵This is why many historians are skeptical, if not hostile, towards the use of memory in historical studies. See, for example, Megill 2007, 54. Others follow more nuanced approaches. See the work of Dominick LaCapra, who underscores the close relation of history and memory. (1998, 19–22).

⁶A short note is needed on my use of the terms “trauma” and “traumatic” in this paper. Individual trauma, of whatever cause, is associated with painful experience involving dissociation, hallucinations, dreams, and physical reactions stemming from an overwhelming event whose reception is not assimilated fully in consciousness at the time of its occurrence. Although, strictly speaking, trauma is associated with individual experience, the term is also used to denote collective sufferings (Alexander 2013). Other scholars outline the shortcomings of trauma as metaphor for collective suffering (Kansteiner 2004).

⁷Many publications in recent years point to a kind of divided memory that involves individuals on one side and institutions on the other. For example, Annamaria Orla-Bukowska in her study on the postwar politics of memory in Poland points to a clear division between official memory of the pro-Soviet regime and the realm of private memory of Poles, which promoted completely different versions of the Polish past (Orla-Bukowska 2006). Such situations do not necessarily suggest that the field of memory is divided along the lines of authentic memory, represented by individuals, and constructed memory, represented by institutions. The opposition between collective and individual memory informs Maurice Halbwachs's celebrated studies on

collective memory (1992). Many critics have outlined the almost complete disregard which Halbwachs shows towards individual memory, as he places it within broader mnemonic practices that defined collective or group memory in the first place. However, the thrust of Halbwachs's analysis regarding the importance of events that hold central importance in collective memory, as well as his "presentism," is widely accepted (Kansteiner 2002).

⁸The argument of Dipesh Chakrabarty relating historical trauma to historical truth is very helpful. Chakrabarty 2007 argues that historical truth is the precondition of historical trauma, meaning that the recognition of trauma requires an organized narrative that would make trauma historically meaningful.

⁹The Venizelos administration, which had been in office since 1928, lost the 1932 elections, partly due to a shift in the refugee vote, and was superseded by a right-wing coalition government for a few months until Venizelos brought it down in the Parliament. The new Liberal government conducted elections in March 1933, which it lost to a coalition of the opposition parties.

¹⁰What Vlachos had in mind was a modest temple precisely on the spot of the execution in the Goudi Park, just beyond the outskirts of Athens. The monument would be constructed by public contributions collected by a committee of well-known Royalists. The Asia Minor monument would have been a far more ambitious project. According to the proposal of Chatzibeis, the idea was to erect a monument large enough to present the engraved names of all military personnel and civilians who died in the war years of 1919–1922. This monument was also to be funded by the public. Ironically, public dispute over the politics of commemoration ended abruptly due to a natural catastrophe. The devastation of a large part of Athens by heavy rainfalls almost wiped out the densely populated areas of the city's central and western parts, inhabited mostly by lower and working classes, among them many refugees. Neither of the monuments was ultimately erected.

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