

# A comparison of elements establishing the relationship between social memory and place in the cinema of the Turkish-Greek population exchange

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## Abstract

In the age of mass migration, displacement, and the increasing number of refugees and migrants, more people are forced to leave their homelands every day. Refugees who are compelled to abandon their countries become disconnected from their homeland, history, and identity, losing their sense of belonging and often having no place to return to. One significant historical example of "displacement and place-making" is the population exchange between Anatolian Greeks and Turks in Greece, formalized by the "Convention and Protocol on the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations" signed on January 30, 1923. Those who were forced to leave their homelands struggled to establish a sense of belonging in their newly settled regions. The population exchange and the consequent forced displacement, as well as the efforts of individuals to construct a new sense of place and belonging, have been reflected in cinema. This study examines the Greek film *Rembetiko*, the Turkish film *My Grandfather's People* (*Dedemin İnsanları*), and the Turkish-Greek co-production *Roza of Smyrna* (*İsmail ve Roza*), all of which address the population exchange. The analysis focuses on the spatial representation of displacement in cinema, spatial memory, and the sense of belonging, particularly in relation to the places abandoned by those who experienced the exchange and their initial impressions of the new settlements. The study also examines the spatial factors influencing place-making and the post-memory transmission of the exchange experience to subsequent generations. This study aims to reveal how forced displacement—a critical, contemporary, social, and political crisis—is echoed in cinema, shedding light on the places that were abandoned and reconstructed by displaced individuals.

**Keywords:** cinema, place-making, population exchange, social memory, sense of belonging

## 1. Introduction

The number of displaced individuals, refugees, and migrants increases every day. Refugees forced to leave their countries are severed from their homelands, histories, and identities, losing their sense of belonging to a place and having no place to return to. Said (2015) explains the experience of exile and displacement through the concepts of "separation from home," "fragmented identity," and "divided self." During the 20th century, in the years of the First and Second World Wars, millions of people were forced to abandon the places where they were born, raised, and had lived for generations. These migrations, which caused spatial dislocation, also led to ruptures in both individual and collective memory. The population exchange examined in this study took place between Turkey and Greece following the signing of the "Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations" on January 30, 1923. As a result of this agreement, 500.000 Muslim Turks living in Greece were relocated to Anatolia, while Orthodox Christian Greeks (referred to as Rums) who remained in Anatolia were resettled in Greece. Including those who had already fled to Greece during the War of Independence, the total number of Rums migrating from Anatolia to Greece reached 1.2 million.

Following the migration process, the displaced populations in Turkey came to be known as "mübadil" (exchangees), while in Greece they were referred to as refugees (Ari, 2000; Yıldırım,

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2006). These groups struggled to adapt, establish a sense of belonging, and rebuild their lives in their new settlements. This struggle found reflection in artistic expressions.

In Greek literature, written works such as novels; for example, *Numero 31328* (Venezis, 2015 [1931]) and *Bloody Lands* (Sotiriyu, 2013 [1962]); biographies, and books containing sketches of places left behind in Anatolia began to emerge shortly after the mass migration. At the Center of Asia Minor Studies, the memories, maps and sketches of refugees regarding the places they lived in Anatolia have been documented. However, due to factors such as the lower literacy rates among the Turks arriving in Anatolia compared to the Rums migrating from Anatolia, the theme of the population exchange did not find a place in Turkish literature until the 1980s (Kirtunç, 2005; Millas, 2005). While the Greeks referred to their forced departure from Anatolia following the War of Independence as the “Asia Minor Catastrophe”, for the Turks, the relocation from Greece to Anatolia under the agreement was perceived as a victory. This divergence in perspectives on the population exchange, along with the distinct nature of their experiences of suffering, contributed to the delayed or earlier representation of the subject in the respective literatures of the two communities (Balta, 2005; Demiröz, 2005; Kirtunç, 2005; Kourtovik, 2005; Millas, 2005). In this study, three films which focus on population exchange are analyzed. The films are the 1983 Greek production “Rembetiko” (Ferris, 1983), the Turkish film “My Grandfather’s People” (Dedemin İnsanları) (Irmak, 2011), and the 2016 Turkish-Greek co-production “Rosa of Smyrna” (Ismail ve Roza) (Kordellas, 2016). The research investigates the spatial memory, sense of belonging, and representations of space images—both of the abandoned and the newly settled villages, towns, and countries—of migrants from both nations who experienced spatial rupture due to the exchange. This is achieved through an analysis of films dealing with the population exchange.

## **2. The Reminders of Place: Spatial Memory, Displacement, and the Making of Identity**

While memories build a bridge between the past and the future, they enable individuals and societies to perceive themselves as the same person or community over time. Remembering occurs through places and objects. Places, as significant instruments of memory, gain even greater importance when associated with unwanted but unavoidable events. Such compulsions undermine the belief in being the same person or society as yesterday and today. Memory is a process of remembering and forgetting. Both are crucial tools for individuals and societies to establish and sustain their existence, yet they are not neutral (Perouse, 2006).

Halbwachs’ (2017) studies on memory emphasize that human beings exist within social relationships and that memory is constructed within society. Individuals build their memories through everyday interactions and recall as long as they remain within the framework of the group to which they belong. Collective memory emerges from the combination of individual recollections within the socially established boundaries of memory. Collective memory is socially constructed; social groups define what can be remembered and how it is remembered (Halbwachs, 2017). Unlike history, collective memory extends beyond mere recollection; it constitutes an active past shaped by lived experiences, fostering both individual and societal identity (Ricoeur, 2012).

Memories rely on the durability and continuity of the material world surrounding them, and place adds a dimension of continuity to collective memory (Halbwachs, 2017; Nora, 2006). The process of remembering is complex and closely tied to place. Spatial images act as the pillars of the bridge of memory and serve as the foundations of identity. Collective memory is linked to places where societies act collectively. It is through places that societies are reminded of who they are. Nora (2006) introduces the concept of “sites of memory,” describing representations, indicators, and symbols that establish and reinforce the relationship between collective memory and place.

Concrete traces present in places that embody the characteristics of a collective past combine with individual, social, historical, and cultural values in the minds of their users, forming “spatial memory.” In addition to representations, indicators, and symbols, the societal, political,

architectural, and cultural events of the era, along with traditions, habits, and neighborly relations, influence the creation of spatial memory. The “spatial memory” formed by spatial experiences in the mind reflects individuals’ emotional and meaningful experiences related to those places (Nora, 2006).

Identity is constructed through the continuity of memory, recollections, and narratives. Radical changes in places disrupt the connection between memory and identity, leading to the breakdown of intergenerational memory (Hareven, 1992). In some cases, rather than continuity, fragmentation, rupture, and separation become more significant in identity formation. While some choose to forget in the face of this fragmentation, many opt to remember. Such remembrance often results in the constant discussion of tragic events and the narration of memories through places. These narratives are so powerful that they embed themselves in the memories of subsequent generations who did not directly experience the events, a phenomenon termed post-memory (Hirsch, 1996, 2008, 2014).

The population exchange process examined in this study also led to fragmentation at both the individual and societal levels. The exchange was implemented following the signing of the “Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations” on January 30, 1923. The agreement included provisions such as the prohibition of return for those subject to the exchange without government permission and the loss of citizenship of the emigrants in their countries of origin upon setting foot in their destination country, where they would automatically acquire new citizenship (Arı, 2000; Meray, 1969; Yıldırım, 2006). This study explores the spatial memory and sense of belonging formed by the exchangees regarding the places they were forced to leave and those where they resettled, as represented in films addressing the population exchange.

### **3. The Reflection of the Population Exchange in Cinema**

The population exchange process, along with the social and personal dramas of the period, initially found expression in literature. In Greek literature, for Rum exchangees, the concept of what was left behind does not represent a country or land but is instead seen as a home and neighborhood (Demirözü, 2005; Millas, 2005). For people who lived without their own state or autonomy, the notions of homeland, country, or nation were not fully developed (Millas, 2005). Greek novels portray the population exchange not as a “national drama” but as an “individual and familial drama” (Demirözü, 2005; Millas, 2005). In contrast, Turkish novels depict the events within a broader national framework, often emphasizing a “we” versus “them” conflict. In Greek literature, the population exchange represents an “end” (Demirözü, 2005; Kourtovik, 2005; Millas, 2005). However, in Turkish literature, the conclusion of the War of Independence and the subsequent population exchange mark a “beginning” (Kirtunç, 2005). This beginning, tied to the establishment of a new political regime, is viewed as a hopeful and transformative event in Turkey, whereas in Greece, it is remembered as “The Asia Minor Catastrophe” (Millas, 2005).

Displacement, forced migration, spatial rupture, and place-making are significant layers of collective memory and spatial remembrance expressed through cinema. In Greek cinema, the film 1922 (Koundouros, 1978) offers direct and striking visual representations of the Asia Minor Catastrophe, revealing the relationship between memory and architectural destruction through images of fire, ruin, and abandonment. Rembetiko (Ferris, 1983) reflects the spatial memory of the past through the musical narrative of a Greek family who migrated from Asia Minor. Although Cloudy Sunday (Manousakis, 2015) does not explicitly focus on the population exchange, it indirectly addresses the theme by depicting the complex relationships among Jewish, Turkish, and Greek minorities in Thessaloniki formed after the exchange.

In Turkish cinema, Waiting for the Clouds (Bulutları Beklerken) (Ustaoglu, 2004), exemplifies how the past persists in architecture through spatial traces and the character’s body language in the story of a Greek family forced to migrate from the Black Sea region. My Grandfather’s People (Dedemin İnsanları) (Irmak, 2011), conveys the spatial experiences of a family coming from Crete through the eyes of a child.

The Turkish-Greek co-production *Rosa of Smyrna* (İsmail ve Roza) (Kordellas, 2016), explores the confrontation of a family with their past after migrating to Greece following the Smyrna (İzmir) fire, focusing on the memory effects of abandoned places.

These films make visible not only physical spaces but also the transforming sense of belonging and spatial memory that accompanies migration. The population exchange and the Asia Minor Catastrophe represent a threshold at which spatial continuities are broken. Cinema serves as a powerful tool to trace these ruptures, reimagine lost places, and question how new senses of belonging are constructed. Within the scope of this study, the spatial reflections of the population exchange in cinema are examined through *Rembetiko* (Ferris, 1983), *My Grandfather's People* (Dedemin İnsanları) (Irmak, 2011) and *Roza of Smyrna* (İsmail ve Roza) (Kordellas, 2016).

#### 4. Methodology

Cinema creates narratives and contexts that establish a discursive connection with the audience. There is no fundamental difference between texts, which derive meaning from the arrangement of words, and films, which are constructed through the combination of cinematographic codes (Ekinci, 2014, p.57). Cinema is approached as a text, with characters' discourses, notable phrases, and key words analyzed in alignment with the theoretical framework of the study (Uçar, 2021, p.58-59).

This study focused on the importance of the places within the cinematic narrative, the analysis of themes and events, and the contextual evaluation of opening scenes and other prominent sequences alongside the film's subject matter. The spatial analysis was conducted based on the assumption that cinema engages in a dialogue with the audience through places. The relationships characters establish with places within the cinematic narrative and significant sequences, as well as the spatial contexts of characters' pivotal discourses, were examined in the study.

This analysis was conducted as a qualitative data examination aimed at revealing the functions of the film in its spatial representation. Thematic analysis was employed as the primary method to systematically identify, analyze, and interpret patterns and themes within the film's spatial elements. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of how displacement, spatial memory, and belonging are expressed through cinematic places. Themes were derived inductively from spatial settings, providing a comprehensive understanding of the film's engagement with spatial memory, collective memory, identity construction and place-making.

#### 5. Analysis of Population Exchange and Spatial Memory in Films

*Rembetiko* (1983) was written and directed by Costas Ferris, inspired by the life of Rembetiko artist Marika Ninou. The film takes its name from "Rembetiko", a genre of music that originated among the Greek populations of İzmir and Istanbul and was carried to Greece by population exchange refugees. This music, characterized by instruments like the bouzouki and baglama, often reflects the thoughts of the singer and critiques societal conditions, earning it a reputation as music of defiance against authority. The film introduces its subject through an on-screen text about Greek refugees and rembetiko music. The film narrates the life of Marika, a Rembetiko artist, from her birth to her death, encapsulating critical moments in Greek history, such as the Asia Minor catastrophe, the population exchange, and World War II.

The story begins in İzmir in 1919, with a Rembetiko performance in an Anatolian café and the simultaneous birth of Marika. The lyrics of the song reference Venizelos coming to İzmir, promising liberation from imperial rule. Shortly after Marika's birth, the audience sees smoke from the İzmir fire, followed by a transition to an image of the shoreline with the caption "İzmir, 1922" (Figure 1). The next scenes depict the plight of Greeks fleeing Anatolia, and archival footage shows people waiting to emigrate (Figure 2) and migration by sea (Figure 3) under the population exchange agreement. The film then transitions to Piraeus in 1925, showing the refugees' settlement.

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**Figure 1** The scene of the 1922 İzmir fire in the film *Rembetiko* at 7th minute (Ferris, 1983)



**Figure 2** The scene of Greeks waiting on the shore to migrate following the exchange decision in the film *Rembetiko* at 7th minute (Ferris, 1983)



**Figure 3** The scene of the migration locations by sea after the 1922 İzmir fire in the film *Rembetiko* at 7th minute (Ferris, 1983)



**Figure 4** The scene of Greeks attempting to migrate by horse-drawn carriage after the 1922 İzmir fire in the film *Rembetiko* at 7th minute (Ferris, 1983)



**Figure 5** The scene of the migration locations by train after the 1922 İzmir fire in the film *Rembetiko* at 7th minute (Ferris, 1983)



**Figure 6** The scene of the entry of Turks into İzmir in the film *Rembetiko* at 30th minute (Ferris, 1983)

After the establishment of a “new home” in Piraeus, Marika's mother's death is depicted alongside the destruction of İzmir by fire. The connection between leaving the “motherland” and the loss of one’s mother is metaphorically significant. The devastation of İzmir, known for its catastrophic fire, parallels the internal burning grief of personal loss. Archival footage of the İzmir fire (Figure 1), the Turkish army entering İzmir (Figure 6), war scenes, population exchange negotiations led by İsmet İnönü at Lausanne, and real images of the migration process (Figure 2, 3, 4 and 5) punctuate the narrative. The film’s transitions between events or years are marked by these historical depictions.

After scenes of İzmir's abandonment and the exchange, Marika sings a *Rembetiko* lyric: “I wish I could escape, far away, to the seas...” For those who had to leave their homes, neighborhoods, and lives behind on the other shore, the “sea” represents more than a physical barrier—it embodies being in limbo, caught between leaving and staying, a perpetual state of “purgatory” in the vast expanse of water.

The lemon market, located near their homes in Piraeus, is one of the recurring locations in the scenes filmed in the area. The scenes depicting the police suppressing a riot in the lemon market (Figure 7) culminate with an empty cage (Figure 8) in Marika’s home. This cage symbolizes the constraints in Marika’s life, a feeling of being unable to leave, and the oppression of having her future decisions made by state authorities, rather than herself.



**Figure 7** The scene of the lemon market in the film *Rembetiko* at 53rd minute (Ferris, 1983)



**Figure 8** The scene of the sense of rootlessness, the empty cage in Marika's house in the film *Rembetiko* at 53rd minute (Ferris, 1983)

Marika's Rembetiko songs are shaped by the context of war. In one of her songs, the lyrics "I'm burning, I'm burning, extinguish me with gas. I'm drowning, I'm drowning, throw me into the deep waters" reflect the story of the people in Piraeus, who, after experiencing the population exchange, are drawn to Rembetiko music. These people, like Marika, relate to the burning in Izmir. The fire in Izmir cannot be extinguished with gas—it only intensifies the flames. As they migrate from Izmir to Greece, they experience a psychological drowning, a sensation that physically manifests in the waters of the sea separating the two countries.

When Marika moves from Piraeus to Athens, her expression becomes numb from the unending displacement. The inability to belong anywhere, the futility of moving from one place to another, becomes meaningless for her. Before the Athens scenes begin, real footage of Hitler, war, and the burning of cities is shown, marking the beginning of yet another war period in Marika's life. The years 1937-1940 are conveyed to the audience through a backdrop of Rembetiko music and real footage. At the end of the Rembetiko song, Marika tells her daughter a story, which begins, "Once upon a time, there was a beautiful city called Izmir" (Figure 9). The story continues, "The most beautiful girl of Izmir, Adriana (the names of Marika's mother and daughter), was the queen of the city. Adriana had a daughter named Marika, and this beautiful kingdom is where the child grew up with everything she could ever wish for" (Figure 10). For Marika, who lost everything after coming to Piraeus at a young age, Izmir is imagined as a city that could provide a child with all the beauty one could wish for, had she stayed there. During the ongoing process of World War II, the line, "As for Izmir, as you said, someone else decides, and others pay the price," reminds the viewer of the escape from Izmir in 1922, emphasizing how decisions were made for people like Marika and others. "There is always a trap set before you. If you fall into it, no one will help you. You must find your way out on your own. This trap carries the names of those who hold great power. If you're lucky, you may have a chance to start anew." When Marika sings this song, there is no expression on her face. The decisions made by powerful figures in her life have led her into this trap—she has been forced to leave her homeland, with no one to help her escape. She has had no luck, failed to build a new life, and has always dreamed of escaping to distant places, to the sea, to begin anew. However, this dream no longer holds any meaning for her.



**Figure 9 and 10** The scene of the story which Marika told her daughter in the film *Rembetiko* at 77th and 78th minute (Ferris, 1983)

Marika, along with her Rembetiko band, has set off to travel to Chicago. The lyrics of the Rembetiko playing at that moment are: "The dark storm in our hearts will take us nowhere. The terminal is dim and cold. The journey is like a wild snake; those with weak hearts cannot endure." No matter where they go, the sense of belonging in their hearts prevents them from reaching any destination. In fact, Marika's statement about being in America, "I've come to distant lands, and I'll stop singing," reflects her attempt to draw strength from this new beginning, but she, too, fails to find it. The words spoken to Marika, "America... America... When you come here, you say 'So what!'" highlight the continued theme of migration and exile. A Greek-American says, "The greatest disaster of Greece was not Izmir, it was migration. At the beginning of the century, a million people came, and those who remained, imagined Greece as a magnificent place." This emphasizes once again the theme of migration and exile, showing that no matter where they go, without a sense of

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belonging, they remain disconnected (Figure 11). For the Greeks living in Anatolia, the end of the war, the entrance of the Turks into Izmir, and the idea of "America, America..." all led to a dream of Greece, but when they arrived, they realized the process was more of a disillusionment—"So what!" they said. The struggles and alienation they faced in Anatolia were carried over to Greece. Marika's response to this sense of alienation is: "Every morning, I look at the sun and beg, 'Burn me, Sun.'" This repetition of burning (Figure 12), which appears in scenes representing Marika's struggles, is reiterated here. As for the lemon market in America, the phrase "The same lemon market, it's just called Maxwell Street (Figure 13) here," underlines that the place itself is of no significance, and no matter where they go, the emotion felt remains the same—one of sameness and loss. Marika did not find the sense of belonging she was searching for in America, and when she returned to Athens in 1956, Athens, too, had changed. The interest in Rembetiko had diminished. After giving her final concert there, she converses with a friend about the profoundness of their statelessness. They are so displaced that this feeling overtakes any capacity for love, motherhood, or any other emotion. After her friend departs, Marika dies, and the film ends with Rembetiko music playing at her funeral, accompanied by dances.



Figure 11 and 12 The scene of the speech about the migration in the film Rembetiko at 125th minute (Ferris, 1983)



Figure 13 The scene of the Maxwell street in America in the film Rembetiko at 126 minute (Ferris, 1983)

The spatial findings of the film are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1** The Scenes About Spatial Memory, Sense of Belonging and Place-Making in the Rembetiko Film

| Themes  | Scenes  |
|---|---|
| Physical Spatial Datas Retained in Spatial Memory After Migration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1922 İzmir Fire (Figure 1)</li> <li>Greeks Waiting on the Shore to Migrate Following the Exchange Decision (Figure 2)</li> <li>Migration Locations by Sea After the 1922 İzmir Fire (Figure 3)</li> <li>Migration Locations by horse-drawn carriage After the 1922 İzmir Fire (Figure 4)</li> <li>Migration Locations by Train After the 1922 İzmir Fire (Figure 5)</li> </ul>   |
|   | The Last Memory of the Abandoned Place  |
|   | The Memory of the House and Neighbours in the Abandoned Place   |
|   | Depictions of Unforgettable Places in the Abandoned Place   |
|   | Spatial Image of the Moment When the Destination Country is First Seen  |
|   | The First Places Experienced in the Destination Country   |
|   | The Depiction of New Living Places in the Destination Country as Streets, Neighbourhoods, and Homes: Neighbourhood Relationships  |
|   | Depiction of the Journey Process  |
|   | Aegean Sea  |
|   | Emphasis on House/ Neighbourhood/ Village/ Street Regarding the Abandoned Place   |
| Sense of Belonging and Place-Making After Migration               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Greeks Attempting to Migrate by Sea After the 1922 İzmir Fire (Figure 3)</li> <li>Greeks Waiting on the Shore to Migrate Following the Exchange Decision (Figure 2)</li> <li>Greeks Attempting to Migrate by horse-drawn carriage After the 1922 İzmir Fire (Figure 4)</li> <li>Greeks Attempting to Migrate by Train After the 1922 İzmir Fire and the Tents They Resided In (Figure 5)</li> <li>Lives Separated by Two Countries, Lives Left Behind on the Opposite Shore, the Pain of Migration (Figure 1 and 3)</li> </ul> |
|   | The Reason for the Abandonment of the Living Place  |
|   | Belonging in the New Living Places in the Destination Country   |
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Empty Cage in Marika's House (Figure 8)</li> <li>The Story Which Marika Told Her Daughter (Figure 9 and 10)</li> <li>The Speech About The Migration (Figure 11 and 12)</li> <li>The Lemon Market in Piraeus (Figure 7)</li> <li>The Maxwell Street in America (Figure 13)</li> </ul>   |

The film of "My Grandfather's People" (Dedemin İnsanları), directed by Çağan Irmak, is based on the real story of his own grandfather, Mehmet Yavaş, a Greek immigrant. It was filmed in 2011. The film is viewed through the eyes of a ten-year-old boy, depicting İzmir in the 1980s (Figure 14), and the story of the 1923 population exchange period is conveyed through the grandfather's stories. The film continues in the form of a narration by Ozan, the young man of the 1980s, who recounts his childhood.

In 1980, when Ozan's family moves to their summer house, referred to as "the garden" (Figure 15) the film transitions from the local and migrant debates of the 1980s, where cries of "This is ours, go away!" are heard, to discussions of "foreignness" and "belonging" in the context of Ozan's grandfather being called "Gavur" (infidel). The migrant, the "other," regardless of their place of origin, is labelled "Gavur" in the İzmir of that time. Despite the occasional conflicting phrases like "This is all of ours!" and "If we start calculating, everyone here is a migrant. Half of these people are 'Gavur,'" the continued discussions throughout the film suggest that this idea is not easily accepted. When school is out, the family heads to their summer house, and the question, "My home, my beautiful home. What did you do during the winter while we were gone?" reflects the emotional connection to the house, which is perceived as a living entity that can experience loneliness in the



absence of the family. The opening of the house's door is also a special ritual. The first step inside is marked by laughter, and the hope is that the time spent there will be filled with joy and laughter.



**Figure 14** The scene of Mehmet Bey's relations with neighbors in the film *My Grandfather's People* at 4th minute (Irmak, 2011)



**Figure 15** The scene of the garden in the film *My Grandfather's People* at 12th minute (Irmak, 2011)

Grandfather Mehmet leaves bottles in the sea. For the locals and tradespeople, Mehmet Bey is considered a "Gavur," and it is believed that he used those bottles to send intelligence reports to Greece. In response to his grandson Ozan's anger at the bottles, Mehmet Bey explains why he left them and shares his experience of the population exchange process. "Some things are unforgettable, like the place where you were born, even a place you grew up a little, or a place you vaguely remember..." he says, describing his childhood in Crete, Rethymno. He talks about his family's reaction to the exchange decision, their departure from their home, and the island. "I remember a house from afar, in Crete, in the village of Rethymno, the sound of the sea coming from afar, that sound is still in my ear, from back then. There was also a tavern, far away. I can hear its sound in the evenings, a young girl would sing. I don't know if that tavern still stands. Anyway... The rooms were whitewashed, everything smelled like the sea. The house was warm, oh, so warm. The cicadas never stopped chirping." As Mehmet Bey describes his village, the longing on his face is conveyed to the audience. Toward the end of his description, eight-year-old Mehmet is seen touching the walls of the houses in his village. As Mehmet enters the door of his house, the depiction of the village concludes. Together with him, as the inside of the house is shown (Figure 16), Grandfather Mehmet describes the family environment, calling the house and the family "What a celebration, what a turmoil!" The family speaks Greek. Grandfather Mehmet Bey talks about the last beautiful memory of Crete, a photo taken just before their departure. This photo, taken in the streets of Rethymno, became the photograph that says, "This is where we lived" (Figure 17). When they left Rethymno, in the haste, the photo was forgotten. "We were happy back then," says Mehmet Bey, reminiscing about the land where he was born and raised.



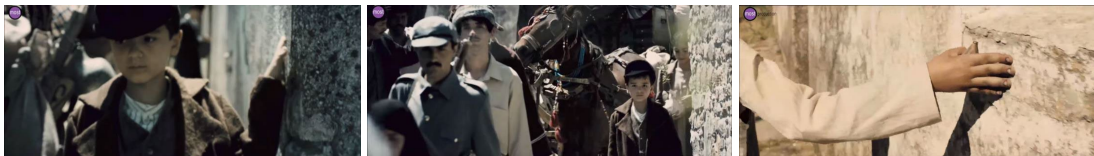
**Figure 16** The scene of the house's inside in the village of Rethymno in the film *My Grandfather's People* at 31st minute (Irmak, 2011)



**Figure 17** The scene of the family photo in Village street in the film *My Grandfather's People* at 31st minute (Irmak, 2011)

Mehmet Bey begins to tell the story of the population exchange, saying, "So many things were left behind in that house, so many." "It was 1923. Things started to heat up. Rumours started spreading. They said there was going to be an exchange. We had to leave there, leave our home. What could we do? Fate was like a castle... Everything was sold... We gathered our belongings. My mother cried, saying we'd leave our home and our neighbours. My mother took the last seedling from the lemon tree in the garden. You'd think that our house would come with it." After these words, they are seen closing their house and bidding farewell to their Greek neighbours. Mehmet says goodbye, touching the houses once more (Figure 18, 19 and 20). The Greeks of Rethymno have been divided into two. Some are sad about the departure of their Turkish neighbours, while others

emphasize that the Turks should, of course, leave (Figure 21 and 22). The Turks have travelled to the ports with wagons. Grandfather Mehmet Bey's oral narration ends, and the impact of the population exchange is seen through the eyes of Child Mehmet. At the port, people are gathered in a crowd, waiting (Figure 23). The "Gülcemal" ship is awaited. The conversations among the waiting crowd are like, "We're going to the homeland, what else? Don't cry." The name of the "Gülcemal" ship is the name of hope. They had waited at the shore for two days. During those two days, Mehmet's mother wanted to go back home to buy potatoes, as there was nothing left to eat. The father's response was, "That's no longer our home; they won't let you in." Like Mehmet's mother, others also took saplings from their gardens (Figure 24). They tried to take whatever they could from their homes, from the places they belonged to. The sound of the Gülcemal ship was heard first. After two days, they were still unsure whether what they had been waiting for had finally arrived. The first sighting of the Gülcemal ship (Figure 25) was the harbinger of starting a new life, a symbol of hope. With the arrival of the ship, the melancholy brought by farewell and waiting dissipated. The words, "Goodbye, my Crete!" are heard, but Crete is not shown once more. The sorrow on Mehmet's face is visible, and Grandfather Mehmet provides an explanation: "We were among the first to migrate. Then fifty ships carried two million souls. Both from there and from here. For a whole year." Following this, the journey on the Gülcemal is depicted for the audience.



**Figure 18, 19 and 20** The scenes of the Mehmet's goodbye in the film *My Grandfather's People* at 33rd and 34th minute (Irmak, 2011)



**Figure 21 and 22** The scene of the Greeks neighbours in Rethymno in the film *My Grandfather's People* at 33rd minute (Irmak, 2011)



**Figure 23** The scene of the Turks gathered at the port in Rethymno, Crete in the film *My Grandfather's People* at 35th minute (Irmak, 2011)

**Figure 24** The scene of people watering their saplings at the harbor in Rethymno, Crete in the film *My Grandfather's People* at 37th minute (Irmak, 2011)

**Figure 25** The scene of the Turks gathered at the port in Rethymno, Crete in the film *My Grandfather's People* at 38th minute (Irmak, 2011)

Grandfather Mehmet says that they did not know how many days the journey lasted. In a scene where he says, "It was my first time seeing Izmir" (Figure 26), the same sorrow is again visible on Child Mehmet's face. Mehmet's first view of Izmir is early in the morning, and the image of the shore is not presented to the audience, emphasizing that it does not matter what Izmir looks like to Mehmet. What matters more to him than how Izmir appears is the home he lost, the life he had, the happy days, and the brother he had to leave behind—the sea, which is represented by a symbolic grave in the garden, is more significant than the visual appearance of Izmir. Izmir is seen for the first time from a great distance, in the middle of the sea. After the first view of Izmir, in Mehmet Bey's narration, the sea journey ends, and the population exchange process continues

with their life in Izmir before settling down. Mehmet Bey talks about how the place called Karantina (Quarantine) was given to them because of their arrival and mentions the first things he saw in Izmir after the ship journey. Quarantine, the hospital, and the bathhouse are the first places Child Mehmet experiences in Izmir (Figure 27). Everyone speaks Turkish, but those who came from Crete do not know Turkish. Mehmet Bey describes the sense of not belonging anywhere, saying, "There, they call us 'Turkish seed,' here they call us 'Gavur.'"



**Figure 26** The scene of the first sight of Izmir in the film *My Grandfather's People* at 40th minute (Irmak, 2011)



**Figure 27** The scene of the quarantine place in the film *My Grandfather's People* at 41st minute (Irmak, 2011)

Mehmet Bey continues, "That was the last time I saw Crete... I grew up early, aged early. But that house, my childhood, still stays there. I never became a child again. I always wondered, who lives there? Would a boy like me walk around that house? If someone found those bottles, and said they found us, I'd believe all this happened," concluding his narration of the population exchange. "Maybe one day, we'll all go together to see my home, to greet it," he hopes.

The narration of the population exchange ends. The film continues with scenes depicting Mehmet Bey's second attempt to go to Greece, which became impossible after the 1980 coup. After the coup, Mehmet Bey, dissatisfied with the country he lived in, prefers to die in the sea (Figure 28) where he left his brother, instead of being torn between the two countries, a place representing the indecision of leaving or staying. After Mehmet Bey's death, a letter arrives at their home. The message in the bottle that reached Crete found its recipient. A woman, who lives in the house described, has written the letter and is inviting them to her home/their home. The film then continues years later, with young Ozan visiting his grandfather's home, the house where Mehmet Bey was born and raised, but no one from the family is able to go. Ozan's question will be, "Was it these waters that separated us?"

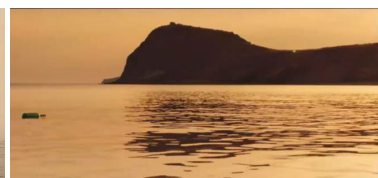
When Ozan goes to his grandfather's house in Rethymno, Crete, the audience also greets the house from afar along with Ozan. The act of touching the walls, as Child Mehmet did when bidding farewell to his house and village, signals Ozan's arrival in the same house, the same village being bid farewell. Ozan learns that the forgotten photo from that house was kept. As he looks at the photo, the sound of the taverna can be heard from a distance. It is late afternoon. The place and its sounds have remained the same, but the people have changed. Ozan also says, "Everything is just as you left it, Grandpa, nothing has changed," and sends a message from 'the other side of the same sea' by leaving a letter in a bottle for his grandfather in the Aegean (Figure 29). The film ends with the sea (Figure 30).



**Figure 28** The scene of the suicide in sea in the film *My Grandfather's People* at 96th minute (Irmak, 2011)



**Figure 29** The scene of sending a message from the other side of the Egean Sea in the film *My Grandfather's People* at 114th minute (Irmak, 2011)



**Figure 30** The last scene of the Egean Sea in the film *My Grandfather's People* at 114th minute (Irmak, 2011)

The spatial findings of the film are summarized in Table 2.



**Table 2** The Scenes About Spatial Memory, Sense of Belonging and Place-Making in the Film “My Grandfather’s People”

| Themes  | Scenes  |
|---|---|
| Physical Spatial Datas Retained in Spatial Memory After Migration | The Last Memory of the Abandoned Place <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Memory of Young Mehmet’s Home and His Farewell to It in Rethymno, Crete (Figure 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20)</li> <li>• Mehmet and His Family Taking a Photo in the Village Street of Rethymno, Crete (Figure 17)</li> </ul>  |
|   | The Memory of the House and Neighbours in the Abandoned Place <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Home and the Life Within It Are Depicted (Figure 16), and Farewells Are Said to Neighbors Upon Departure (Figure 21 and 22)</li> </ul>   |
|   | Depictions of Unforgettable Places in the Abandoned Place <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The House, Village, and Streets in Rethymno (Figure 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 and 22)</li> </ul>  |
|   | Spatial Image of the Moment When the Destination Country is First Seen <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Distant View of Izmir Dominated by the Sea (There Is No Image Indicating That It Is Izmir) (Figure 26)</li> </ul>   |
|   | The First Places Experienced in the Destination Country <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Quarantine and Bath Processes, Mentioned as the Reason for the Name of the Quarantine District in Izmir (Figure 27)</li> </ul>   |
|   | The Depiction of New Living Places in the Destination Country as Streets, Neighbourhoods, and Homes: Neighbourhood Relationships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The House in Izmir, the Neighbourhood Where Everyone Lives in Close Proximity, the House with a Garden and Its Surrounding Environment, Relationships with Non-Migrant Neighbours and Migrants (Figure 14)</li> </ul> |
|   | Depiction of the Journey Process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Process of Waiting for the Ship at the Shore (Figure 23)</li> <li>• People Watering Their Saplings at the Harbor in Rethymno, Crete (Figure 24)</li> <li>• The Journey Process with the Gülcemal Ship (Figure 25)</li> </ul>  |
|   | Aegean Sea <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Lives Separated by Two Countries, the Lives They Were Forced to Leave Behind on the Other Shore, the Pain of Migration (Figure 28, 29 and 30)</li> </ul>  |
|   | Emphasis on House/ Neighbourhood/ Village/ Street Regarding the Abandoned Place <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Home Is Depicted, and the Village and Street Locations Are Shown While Taking Photographs and Descending to the Shore for Migration (Figure 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 and 22)</li> </ul>  |
|   | The Reason for the Abandonment of the Living Place <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Migration for Exchange: Departure from Crete, Rethymno to the Harbors by Ox-Carts (Figure 18, 19, 21 and 22.)</li> <li>• Gathering at the Harbor in Rethymno, Crete (Figure 23 and 24)</li> <li>• The First Sight of the Gülcemal Ship at the Harbor in Rethymno, Crete (Figure 25)</li> </ul>      |
| Sense of Belonging and Place-Making After Migration               | Belonging in the New Living Places in the Destination Country <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Process of Exclusion by the Local Population, the Sense of Belonging Developed Towards Izmir and Turkey (Figure 14)</li> <li>• Sence of Belonging to the summer house (Figure 15)</li> </ul>   |

The film of “Roza of Smyrna” (İsmail ve Roza) directed by **Giorgos Kordellas (2016)** and written by Christina Lazaridi, is a Turkish-Greek co-production. While the film does not delve into the details of the population exchange process, it focuses on the lives that changed as a result of the exchange.

The film begins with a wedding in a church (Figure 31). Turkish soldiers entering the church with weapons, a gunfight, and the bride (Roza) being forcibly taken to a horse by a Turkish man are depicted. The historical context and location are not mentioned in the scenes, but it is understood that these events take place during the period when the city of Izmir, which was occupied by the Greeks in 1922, was reclaimed by the Turkish army.



**Figure 31** The beginning scene of the church wedding in the film Roza of Smyrna at 1st minute (Kordellas, 2016)

The film continues in Athens in 1987. Dimitris, who works in a museum, is researching objects left behind by immigrants when they were forced to leave their homes during the population



exchange, for an exhibition on the subject. From a family photo taken in front of Hagia Sophia (Figure 32) it is understood that Dimitris is the son of a family that was forced to migrate from Istanbul after the population exchange. The term 'lost lands' is used for Asia Minor. Dimitris and his team will go to Izmir to find objects that Greek immigrants left behind in their homes and sacred places during the exchange. After Hagia Sophia, Izmir is the first location from Anatolia shown in the film (Figure 33).

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**Figure 32** The scene of Dimitris' family photo taken in front of Istanbul's Hagia Sophia in the film *Roza of Smyrna* at 6th minute (Kordellas, 2016)



**Figure 33** The scene of Izmir in the film *Roza of Smyrna* at 9th minute (Kordellas, 2016)

Locations presented to the audience in Izmir (Figure 37) include the Atatürk Statue (Figure 34), Kemeraltı Bazaar (Figure 35), The Clock Tower (Figure 38 and 39) and an antique shop where items bearing traces of the immigrants are searched. A painting depicting the entry of the Turkish forces into Izmir (Figure 36) is a key item in the antique shop. The wedding dress, which belongs to the bride from the beginning of the film, is found in the antique shop. The details of what happened on the wedding day are learned from the shopkeeper. The wedding day in Izmir is described as the day the great fire, referred to as "the day the events began," occurred. The wedding dress was found by the father of the antique shop owner. The term "before Izmir became too chaotic" is used to describe that period. The family of the girl from Bornova intended to have the wedding and migrate to Greece. However, on the day of the wedding, Izmir descended into chaos. What happened during and after the wedding remains unknown. The family's house remained closed for years, with no one returning. The population exchange took place, and Turkish immigrants from Greece moved into the houses left behind by the Greeks.



**Figure 34** The scene of the Atatürk Statue in Izmir in the film *Roza of Smyrna* at 11th minute (Kordellas, 2016)



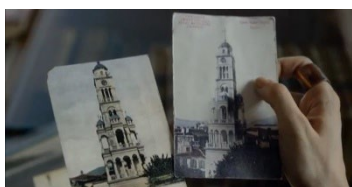
**Figure 35** The scene of Kemeraltı Bazaar in Izmir in the film *Roza of Smyrna* at 13th minute (Kordellas, 2016)



**Figure 36** The scene of the painting depicting the entry of the Turks into Izmir in the antique shop in the film *Roza of Smyrna* at 15th minute (Kordellas, 2016)



**Figure 37** The scene of Izmir in the film *Roza of Smyrna* at 52nd minute (Kordellas, 2016)



**Figure 38** The scene of Izmir postcards in the film *Roza of Smyrna* at 52nd minute (Kordellas, 2016)



**Figure 39** The scene of Izmir Clock Tower in the film *Roza of Smyrna* at 55th minute (Kordellas, 2016)

The process of discovering the owner of the wedding dress and what happened on that day forms the central plot of the film. The wedding dress's owner, the elderly woman Roza, refers to

Izmir as "hell." The reunion of Roza and İsmail, which gives the film its title, takes place years later in Istanbul. The first image of Istanbul shown in the film is of the Topkapı Palace in the Historical Peninsula (Figure 40). Later, significant historical buildings such as the Yeni Mosque (Figure 41) and Hagia Sophia (Figure 42) are emphasized, with Hagia Sophia highlighted as an important site for the Greeks in Istanbul.



**Figure 40** The scene of Topkapı Palace in Istanbul in the film *Roza of Smyrna* at 70th minute (Kordellas, 2016)



**Figure 41** The scene of Eminönü Yeni Mosque in Istanbul in the Film *Roza of Smyrna* at 70th minute (Kordellas, 2016)



**Figure 42** The scene of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul in the film *Roza of Smyrna* at 75th minute (Kordellas, 2016)

The film nears its end with scenes showing Roza looking out at the sea across from the Süleymaniye Mosque, where she is later found dead the next morning (Figure 43). In his lecture on the love story of Roza and İsmail, Dimitris mentions the state of Izmir at the time. The first image on the slide showing the city depicts Izmir during the time when it was inhabited by Greeks (Figure 44 and 45). The film concludes with slides depicting the burning of Izmir (Figure 46 and 47).



**Figure 43** The scene of the sea in Istanbul in the film *Roza of Smyrna* at 91st minute (Kordellas, 2016)



**Figure 44 and 45** The scenes of early 20th century Izmir Images from Dimitris' conference in the film *Roza of Smyrna* at 91st minute (Kordellas, 2016)



**Figure 46 and 47** The scenes of the 1922 Izmir fire images from Dimitris' conference in the film *Roza of Smyrna* at 91st minute (Kordellas, 2016)

The spatial findings of the film are summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3** The Scenes About Spatial Memory, Sense of Belonging and Place-Making in the Film Roza of Symrna (İsmail ve Roza)

|   | Topics of Population Exchange  | Scenes  |
|---|--|---|
|   | The Last Memory of the Abandoned Place   | The Burning of İzmir (Figure 46 and 47)   |
| Physical Spatial Datas Retained in Spatial Memory After Migration | The Memory of the House and Neighbours in the Abandoned Place  | None  |
|   | Depictions of Unforgettable Places in the Abandoned Place  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Historic Areas of İzmir Inhabited by Greeks (Figure 33, 34, 35, 36, 37 and 38)</li> <li>• Istanbul and Hagia Sophia, Topkapı Palace, Yeni Cami (Figure 32, 40, 41 and 42)</li> </ul> |
|   | Spatial Image of the Moment When the Destination Country is First Seen   | None  |
|   | The First Places Experienced in the Destination Country  | None  |
|   | The Depiction of New Living Places in the Destination Country as Streets, Neighbourhoods, and Homes: Neighbourhood Relationships | None  |
|   | Depiction of the Journey Process   | None  |
|   | Aegean Sea   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Lives Left Behind Across the Shores That Separate Two Nations: The Pain of Migration (Figure 43)</li> </ul>  |
|   | Emphasis on House/Neighbourhood/Village/Street Regarding the Abandoned Place   | Photographs Depicting İzmir During the Period of Greek Inhabitants (Figure 44 and 45)   |
| Sense of Belonging and Place-Making After Migration               | The Reason for the Abandonment of the Living Place   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Recapture of İzmir by the Turkish Army (Figure 31)</li> </ul>  |
|   | Belonging in the New Living Places in the Destination Country  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>  |

The Greek productions Rembetiko and Roza of Smyrna (İsmail ve Roza) (written and directed by Greek creators) share a common perspective, portraying the population exchange from the viewpoint of the Greek population. Rather than focusing on the migration that took place following the population exchange agreement, both films emphasize the events leading to the migration—specifically, the recapture of İzmir by the Turkish army from Greek occupation, which forced the Greeks to leave their cities. In both films, the final images of İzmir in the minds of the migrants are tied to the Great Fire of İzmir. The concepts of fire, hell, and burning are frequently highlighted throughout these films. İzmir and its destruction symbolize the lost homelands.

In contrast, the film of My Grandfather's People (Dedemin İnsanları) emphasizes the necessity of migration, leaving behind one's home, neighbours, and homeland. The final image of the homeland is that of Crete, remembered fondly as a beautiful and cherished place. In all three films, no spatial imagery is provided for the moment when the migrants first arrive in their new countries. In My Grandfather's People (Dedemin İnsanları), the depiction of the arrival in İzmir is vague; the scene showing the city from a distance gives no distinct sense of its identity as İzmir. This lack of focus on the new place suggests that the destination holds little importance for the migrants; it is the abandoned homeland that remains significant.

Rembetiko portrays life in Greece after leaving Anatolia, while My Grandfather's People (Dedemin İnsanları) depicts life in Anatolia following migration from Greece. In both films, a common theme emerges both groups of migrants are marginalized by the local population, struggle to gain acceptance, and find it difficult to feel a sense of belonging in their new locations. In Rembetiko, life in Piraeus is depicted as being no different from the marginalized and scorned existence in Anatolia. Similarly, My Grandfather's People (Dedemin İnsanları) highlights how the Turkish locals continuously refer to the migrants as "infidels," leading to the lament, "Over there, we are seeds of Turks; over here, we are infidels."

In Rembetiko, the characters' lack of belonging in their new places is conveyed through their constant desire to move elsewhere, coupled with their realization that no matter where they go, the result remains the same. This suggests that, along with the burning of İzmir, they lost their sense of identity and belonging. Conversely, My Grandfather's People (Dedemin İnsanları) demonstrates the establishment of a sense of belonging. The transformation of the house they "visited only to

stay for a short while" into a vibrant, living place indicates their sense of attachment. The emotional difficulty of leaving their former home in Crete, symbolized by the grandfather's musings about a young boy like himself roaming the house they left behind, conveys the deep connection between place and identity.

In *Roza of Smyrna* (İsmail ve Roza), the narrative does not centre on the lived experiences of those who directly witnessed the population exchange. *Roza*, a survivor of the exchange, describes İzmir as "hell". For her, the final image of İzmir is the violent conflict at the church. In the film, depictions of İzmir are presented through the perspective of those researching the period rather than through *Roza's* personal experience. The historical buildings of İzmir serve as spatial symbols for the displaced Greek population. Beyond İzmir, the film highlights the loss of Istanbul (referred to as Constantinople by the Greeks), the capital of the Byzantine Empire, and significant landmarks such as the Topkapı Palace and Hagia Sophia, which represent powerful spatial and cultural symbols of loss.

The recurring motif of the sea is significant in all three films. The protagonists of *My Grandfather's People* (Dedemin İnsanları) and *Roza of Smyrna* (İsmail ve Roza) both meet their ends while near the sea, symbolizing the dichotomy of departure and stasis, as well as the loss of identity and belonging. The sea is portrayed as a natural place that evokes memories of separation and displacement.

Table 4 summarizes the findings related to population exchange and spatial representation in *Rembetiko*, *My Grandfather's People* (Dedemin İnsanları), and *Roza of Smyrna* (İsmail ve Roza).

**Table 4** Spatial Analyses of Population Exchange Films

| Themes   | Scenes   |   |   |
|--|--|---|---|
|  | Rembetiko  | My Grandfather's People (Dedemin İnsanları)   | Roza of Smyrna (İsmail ve Roza)   |
| The Last Memory of the Abandoned Place   | The Burning of İzmir   | The Last Image of Their Homeland (Houses and Streets of Crete)  | The Burning of İzmir  |
| The Memory of the House and Neighbours in the Abandoned Place  | None   | The house and the life within it are depicted, and farewell is said to the neighbors upon departure.  | None  |
| Depictions of Unforgettable Places in the Abandoned Place  | İzmir  | The house, village, and streets in Rethymno   | The historical areas in İzmir where the Greeks lived, as well as Istanbul, Hagia Sophia, and the Topkapı Palace         |
| Spatial Image of the Moment When the Destination Country is First Seen   | None   | A distant view of İzmir dominated by the sea (with no indication that it is İzmir).   | None  |
| The First Places Experienced in the Destination Country  | None   | The quarantine and bathhouse processes.   | None  |
| The Depiction of New Living Places in the Destination Country as Streets, Neighbourhoods, and Homes: Neighbourhood Relationships | The house in Piraeus, the immigrant neighborhood, neighborly relations, lemon market.            | The house in İzmir, the neighborhood where everyone lives in close proximity, the house with a garden and its surrounding environment, and the relationships with both non-immigrant neighbors and fellow immigrants. | None  |
| Depiction of the Journey Process   | Real images and the migration process.   | Waiting for the ship on the shore and the journey by ship   | None  |
| Aegean Sea   | The lives left behind on the opposite shore, divided by two countries, and the pain of migration | The lives separated by two countries, left behind on the opposite shore, and the pain of migration.   | The lives divided by two countries, the lives they were forced to leave on the other shore, and the sorrow of migration |

Physical Spatial Datas Retained in Spatial Memory After Migration



|   |  |  |  |   |
|---|--|--|--|---|
| Sense of Belonging and Place-Making After Migration | Emphasis on House/Neighbourhood/Village/Street Regarding the Abandoned Place | None   | The house is depicted, and the village and streets are shown while photographs are being taken and as they descend to the shore for migration. | Photographs of İzmir during the time it was inhabited by Greeks." |
|   | The Reason for the Abandonment of the Living Place                           | The Recapture of İzmir by the Turkish Army                     | Population Exchange  | The Recapture of İzmir by the Turkish Army                        |
|   | Belonging in the New Living Places in the Destination Country                | "Exclusion by the local population and a sense of rootlessness | The process of exclusion by the local population, and the sense of belonging developed towards İzmir and Turkey.                               | None  |

## 6. Conclusion

This study has analyzed the relationship between spatial memory, collective memory, place-making, and belonging through the spatial representations in three films that address the population exchange. It reveals how forced migration, as exemplified by the population exchange, disrupted and transformed individuals' bonds with place. The films under examination demonstrate that the exchange was not merely a physical relocation but also a profound psychological and cultural rupture related to the reconstruction of spatial identity.

In *Rembetiko* and *Roza of Smyrna* (İsmail ve Roza), the destruction of İzmir's iconic places—ingrained in the spatial memory—during the great fire, and the traumatic spatial rupture associated with the departure of the Greek population, are depicted through powerful and affective images. In *My Grandfather's People* (Dedemin İnsanları), on the other hand, the narrative reflects a gradual reconstruction of belonging in the new settlement. Notably, even a summerhouse initially intended as a temporary shelter is transformed into a permanent home, emphasizing how a place can be embraced both physically and emotionally.

A shared feature across all three films is the ambiguous and indistinct representation of the new places to which the displaced populations migrated. This cinematic vagueness highlights that place is not merely a physical setting but a deeply emotional and identity-laden construct. For displaced individuals, it is often the place left behind—not the one reached—that holds lasting significance. From an architectural and spatial design perspective, this underscores that settlements are not only functional entities but are also imbued with historical and emotional meaning.

The recurring imagery of the sea in the films symbolically represents displacement. The sea emerges as a metaphor for both separation and rootlessness. In this sense, it transcends its physicality and becomes a symbol of the loss of spatial belonging and the perpetual feeling of dislocation.

This study demonstrates how the population exchange was perceived differently by the Turkish and Greek communities and how these perceptions are reflected in the spatial dimensions of cinema. The imagery of place, belonging, and rootedness changes in accordance with the events that forced people to leave their homelands and attempt to establish new lives elsewhere. Even a century after the exchange, the places that were once inhabited and the memories associated with them continue to be transmitted across generations, finding expression in the arts. The study highlights how a historical event leaves traces on the societies that experienced it, and how these traces are transmitted and reshaped through cultural production.

Through the lens of these films, the complex relationship between migration and place becomes legible from the perspective of the architectural discipline. The spatial memory shaped by the migration experience reveals that architecture is not only related to the built environment but also deeply intertwined with human memory, identity, and emotion. In this regard, spatial design should be understood not only as a physical process but also as one woven into social and cultural memory.

This study paves the way for further investigations into how forced migration experiences are spatially embodied as traumatic processes. Cultural productions such as films, documentaries, and

literary texts can be analyzed from an architectural perspective, particularly in terms of their spatial representations—architectural elements, spatial practices, and scenes of transition. Analyses focusing on the contrasts between pre- and post-migration places demonstrate that architectural narrative is nourished not only by physical structures but also by visual and narrative representations. Comparing migration-themed films from different geographies can yield insights into the spatial representation of migration across cultures. Such comparative analyses contribute to understanding both the cultural diversity of architectural production and the universal spatial effects of displacement. Documentaries, in particular, offer rich material on migrant living conditions, spatial confinement, and resettlement processes. These productions can be incorporated into architectural research and discussed alongside issues such as spatial justice, the right to housing, and housing crises.

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### **CRediT Authorship Contribution Statement**

*Elif Vurucular Kesimci: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Analysis.*

### **Declaration of Competing Interest**

*The author declares that there are no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.*

### **Data Availability**

*All data are available within the paper.*

### **Ethics Statement**

*An ethics committee approval was not required for this study.*

### **Resume**

*Elif Vurucular Kesimci graduated from the Department of Architecture at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University in 2010 and began her professional career in an architectural office in Bursa. Since 2015, she has been working as a faculty member in the Department of Architecture at Bursa Technical University, where she is currently an Assistant Professor. She completed her master's and PhD studies at Yıldız Technical University, focusing on public space analysis through Space Syntax in her master's thesis, and on public place, cultural heritage, and intergenerational spatial memory in her doctoral research. Her current academic work explores urban space, memory, and cultural continuity.*