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## PERSONAL NARRATIVES OF TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE: FROM ORAL NARRATIVES TO COMMUNITY WEBSITES<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract.** This paper examines personal narratives of survivors of the wreck of the *Empire Patrol*, a British ship that was returning 497 inhabitants of Castellorizo, a Greek island in the southeastern Aegean, to their homeland in September 1945, after they had spent two years in a refugee camp in Nuseirat, Gaza. Led by a survivor who was a child at the time of the shipwreck, several survivors memorialized the event by creating a community website, [www.empirepatrol.com](http://www.empirepatrol.com), in Australia, where their compatriots had already established migrant communities prewar. In this paper, I focus on the survivors' website-based traumatic narratives and compare them to oral narratives regarding the shipwreck which I recorded while conducting multi-sited, longitudinal and collaborative ethnographic research among the Castellorizians in Australia and in Greece. I explore "orality" in the case of website narratives by examining the new context and symbolism and the performative elements involved, and the community bonds forged among contributors and visitors to the website. I also examine the impact of these digital survivors' narratives on redefining the sense of belonging and communal identity among Australian-born Castellorizians and on rendering the World War II history of the Castellorizians part of wider public history in Australia.

**Keywords:** personal narratives of traumatic experience, community websites, digital orality, Castellorizo, *Empire Patrol* shipwreck, lieux de mémoire, diaspora

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## **1. Introduction – Questions raised**

This study focuses on personal narratives of traumatic experiences, which are amongst the most common kinds of narrative through time and space. People have always had traumatic experiences, and they have always narrated them in prose or in verse. These narratives are transmitted both orally (through storytelling, interviews, narrative songs, laments, etc.) and in written form, in the form of autobiographies, biographies, articles in newspapers and as sections in academic books, and, most recently, increasingly on the internet, as part of websites or in other forms (videos, blogs, etc.). Can we talk about “orality” in the case of such website narratives, and if so, how do we define it? This paper looks at personal narratives of traumatic experience included in a community website created to memorialize this experience and compares them to the oral narratives that I recorded regarding the same traumatic event while conducting fieldwork in this community. I attempt to discuss the ways of transmission in both cases and to examine any similarities and/or differences between the two categories of narrative, oral and digitized. As for my methodology, I focus on the multi-sited, longitudinal and collaborative ways in which I, as researcher and ethnographer, went about researching this community website. Finally, I discuss the appeal of such a website both to community members of younger generations and to the wider public and examine its value as a tool of forging communal identity and of contributing to public history and identity.

## **2. The background to the narratives:**

### **The Castellorizians and their shipwreck**

This text is an offshoot of my doctoral fieldwork, which was followed by longitudinal and multi-sited ethnographic research among a group of Greek migrants and their second- and third-generation descendants originating from the island of Castellorizo in Greece and now settled in Western Australia (Chryssanthopoulou 1993; Chryssanthopoulou 2022a). I conducted my initial fieldwork between 1984 and 1986 with the Castellorizian Greek community of Perth, Western Australia, which led to a doctorate in social

anthropology. I revisited this community in 2004 to study the changes that had occurred in the intervening twenty years. I have also been following this community for about forty years, focusing on the transnational bonds which have developed between the Castellorizians of Australia and those settled on Castellorizo, as well as among the wider Castellorizian diasporic community (Chryssanthopoulou 2020; Chryssanthopoulou 2022b). In this present paper, I focus on the ways in which members of the worldwide Castellorizian community have used oral narrations and narratives on a specially created website to memorialize a traumatic event in their island's history. They refer to the event as "the shipwreck of the Castellorizians" (*to navagio ton Castellorizion*) or "the *Empire Patrol* Disaster".

Castellorizo, also known as "Megisti", is a small, one-settlement island on the southeasternmost border of Greece. Lying only 1.5 miles off the Turkish coast, it was inhabited by Greeks since ancient times and was part of the Ottoman Empire until 1913. After a brief period of self-government, it was ruled by the French till 1921 and the Italians till 1943. Foreign rule, war and natural disasters led to a first wave of chain migration by Castellorizians to Australia during the first three decades of the 20c. They followed in the footsteps of their pioneer, Arthur August (Athanasios Avgoustis), who settled in Perth, Western Australia, in the mid-1890s and became instrumental in establishing the economic, social, and cultural infrastructure of the Greek community in the city (Yiannakis 1996: 68-76; Chryssanthopoulou 2020: 120-121).

The events involved in the traumatic shipwreck run as follows: Castellorizo, under Italian administration until 1943, was then occupied by British forces who between 1943 and 1945 used the island as a supply base for the Allied fleet. In October 1943, the island was bombed by the German airplanes, resulting in the decision by the British army to transport its entire Greek population of about 1,500 people first to Cyprus and then to Gaza, Palestine. The Castellorizians lived as refugees in the camp of Nuseirat for about two years under the auspices of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (U.N.R.R.A.). Upon their return home, on September 29, 1945, the *Empire Patrol*, which was the last of three ships sailing back to Castellorizo and was transporting a contingent of 497 repatriating refugees, mostly women and children, caught fire and sank 70 miles off Port Said. Thirty-three Castellorizians lost their lives and many of those who returned either to Castellorizo or

to the Castellorizian communities of Egypt, soon migrated to Australia, where many of their compatriots had already settled in.

Among those who left for Perth was Paul Boyatzis, then a young boy who took with him the memory of the event and a photograph showing him with another couple of refugee children walking barefoot in Port Said after the shipwreck.



Figure 1. Report of the shipwreck, Images, October 1945  
(Source: P. Boyatzis & N. Pappas 1995, *Embers on the Sea*.  
*The Empire Patrol Disaster 1945*, Halstead Press, p. 7)

Boyatzis went on to become a doctor in Perth and embarked on a systematic effort to keep the memory of the shipwreck alive as part of Castellorizian history in Australia. In collaboration with other Castellorizians, he organized memorial services, promoted the publication of articles in Australian newspapers on the anniversary of the shipwreck (Schmitt 1985; Zekulich 1995), and co-wrote a book in collaboration with a second-generation Castellorizian historian, Nicholas Pappas (Boyatzis & Pappas 1995). Finally,

he embarked on the creation of a website, [www.empirepatrol.com](http://www.empirepatrol.com), in which the events of the evacuation of Castellorizo in 1943, of the refugee years in Palestine and of the shipwreck have been recorded through narrative, poetry and photographs. This site is much more than a *lieu de mémoire*/site of memory of the shipwreck (Nora 1989). Australian-born Castellorizians and others whose ancestors were associated in some way or other with the shipwreck or who are generally interested and moved by this story of the cultural endurance displayed by the Castellorizians, also visit the website. They express their wish to learn of the island's history, to reflect on the postmemory-inducing photographs (Hirsch 1997; Hirsch 2008) and to exchange information with other "descendants of the shipwreck" (*i apogoni tou navagiou*), as they call themselves, in the site guestbook.

### 3. Methodology employed:

#### Longitudinal, multi-sited and collaborative ethnography

My analysis is based on longitudinal and multi-sited study and research in the Castellorizian Greek ethno-regional diaspora in Australia. In fact, I attempt to show the value of such comprehensive analysis when we deal with community websites. By "ethno-regional" I refer to diasporic individuals' and groups' "attachment – socio-economic or symbolic or both – to the particular region within or even outside Greece, where they themselves or their families originate from", that is to their "small" and intimate regional Greek homelands, below the ethnonational level (Chryssanthopoulou 2009: 202; Chryssanthopoulou 2022b: 317-319)<sup>3</sup>. The Castellorizians or "Cazzies"<sup>4</sup>, as they are widely known in Australia,

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<sup>3</sup> The regional dimension in the formation of the national, ethnic, diasporic, and personal identities of Greek people has been studied in connection to the segmentary model of the organization of Greek communities by Campbell (1964), Herzfeld (1985), Papataxiarchis (2006: 25-39), and Chryssanthopoulou (1993, 2003, 2009, 2022b). See also Dimen & Friedl (1976), for an early recognition of the significance of regionalism in the anthropological study of Greece.

<sup>4</sup> Diaspora Castellorizians spell the name of the island with a -K- instead of a -C-, as it is generally spelt in English, since it derives from the word "Castello", meaning "castle". They do so to demonstrate their intimate connection with their island of origin and their own Greekness, as in Greek its name is spelt with a -K-, as "Kastellorizo". Castellorizians

constituted about half of the Greek population of Perth, spanning up to three generations at the time of my doctoral fieldwork (1984-1986), and were dominant in the structures of the entire Greek community (i.e., in associations, Greek Orthodox churches, etc.) (Chryssanthopoulou 1993; Yiannakis 1996). Their collective hegemony in the Greek community and the ideology and myth surrounding it were based on the idealized past involving the seafaring and trading elite of the island before its economic decline (Chryssanthopoulou 2003).

My engagement with the Castellorizian diaspora has been longitudinal and stretches from the mid-1980s to the present. It has also been multi-sited, as it takes account of the inherent mobility of diaspora Castellorizians, whom I needed to follow as an ethnographer, together with things, metaphors, plots, stories, or allegories, lives or biographies, and conflicts relating to them (Marcus 1998)<sup>5</sup>. My interlocutors being refugees, migrants, and often transnational citizens, thus moved within an ethnoscape (Appadurai 1996). These two methods of research allowed me to trace the formations and transformations of Castellorizian cultural values, practices, and identities “across and within multiple sites of activity” (Marcus 1998: 80). I have followed the attitudes and practices of successive Castellorizian generations as they moved from a somewhat introverted and hegemonical stance to a more open and collaborative way of coexistence with other Greeks and with non-Greek Australians. These attitudes and practices were manifested through the increase in mixed marriages and enhanced by Australian Castellorizians’ transnational communication with Castellorizo itself, the island of their forebears, from the 1980s onwards (Chryssanthopoulou 2022b: 331-336). Until then, thanks to the destruction the island had suffered during the war, Castellorizo had been largely uninhabitable, let alone a destination favored by its diaspora. At present, however, the island is a favorite diaspora destination for Castellorizians of all generations, who have revitalized it financially and culturally (Chryssanthopoulou 2015 [2009]; Chryssanthopoulou 2020). The narratives of the traumatic shipwreck

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are generally referred to as “Cazzies” in Australia, for an easier pronunciation in English. In their writings, they spell this word, too, with a -K-, i.e. “Kazzies.”

<sup>5</sup> For an analysis of another ethno-regional community website, namely [www.Kythera-family.net](http://www.Kythera-family.net), based on multi-sited ethnography, see Chryssanthopoulou 2014.

experience, now familiar to the younger generations of Castellorizians thanks to the website examined in the present paper, have also contributed to the development of the transnational bonds of the diaspora with Castellorizo.

When I decided to write a book on the Castellorizians of Perth, having conducted research among them for ca 30 years, written a doctoral thesis and published several articles, I was looking for a topic I had not focused on before. It may have been through serendipity that I googled the name of the boat '*Empire Patrol*' and came across the site memorializing the shipwreck, created in 2010. I had already attended the first major memorial service for the victims of the shipwreck in Perth in September 1985 as a young doctoral researcher. I had also recorded interviews with two Castellorizians, Despina Misomike, on Castellorizo, in July 2007, and Spyros Houlis, on Rhodes, in August 2005, as part of follow-up research that I conducted in Greece. These two had both been children when they were involved in the shipwreck. Despina had lost one of her brothers, while Spyros' entire family comprising nine children was saved. His mother, Kamariani, had composed a narrative song, a *rima*, in Greek, recounting the shipwreck and its aftermath, which Spyros sang for me in an emotionally charged atmosphere. I naturally decided to include these first-hand narratives of the shipwreck in my book. Adding to this material, I recorded the experience of another Castellorizian, Evangelos Chatziyiannakis, whom I interviewed in his office in Metropolitan Hospital in Athens, in 2014 and in 2016. He is now a surgeon, but had also been a child at the time of the shipwreck. These oral narratives were analyzed in my book, which also included a CD – currently, a link to a digital educational platform – containing the audio recordings of the interviews.

During my doctoral fieldwork, I became personally acquainted with most of the narrators whose traumatic accounts were recorded on the website [www.empirepatrol.com](http://www.empirepatrol.com). However, I felt that I needed to know more about the creators of the site and the motives and process that led to its creation. Thus, I embarked on a long and fruitful correspondence with Paul Boyatzis, who kindly responded to my emails and sent me valuable published and audio-visual material. This comprised articles published in Australian newspapers on the shipwreck and CDs and

DVDs containing recordings of commemorations of the shipwreck in Perth. This latter material was valuable, as it recorded the continuing impact that the memorialization of the event and of the trauma of the shipwreck had had upon the Castellorizians of Perth. I therefore feel that my book, *Sites of Memory in Castellorizian Migration and Diaspora* (Chryssanthopoulou 2022a), benefited greatly from such a collaborative ethnographic approach, *i.e.* an approach which seeks to integrate the needs and views of our informants-consultants by employing a dialogical method and active interaction between the researcher and his/her collocutors at every stage of the ethnographic process, from fieldwork to writing and dissemination (Tedlock 1987; Lassiter 2005; Butler 2009).



Figure 2. The author of this paper with Castellorizian survivors who have contributed narratives to the website in the Castellorizian House in Perth, July 2004.

Paul Boyatzis, the main mover behind the website, is first on my right  
(Photo credit: V. Chryssanthopoulou)

When my book was finally published in 2017 (in its first edition), Paul and the Castellorizian Association of Western Australia were among the first to receive it. His warm response to its publication gave me the reassurance that any researcher writing about the traumatic experiences of people who are still alive wishes to have. For the official launch of the book, Paul Boyatzis sent me a letter, the following excerpt from which exemplifies the dialogue that had developed between him, my main interlocutor, and me, a researcher, regarding our approaches to the website:



“I am grateful to you that you made the *Empire Patrol* Story such a deep and meaningful work of literature. [...] I note with interest your emphasis, amongst other items, on the “*Empire Patrol* website” as a Site of Memory. In a way, I am pleasantly surprised. What we intended to create as an easily accessible medium of information has attained such a central part of your scholarly work. [...] One may look at your work as a follow up to our website. Many thanks for adding to the history of Castellorizo and to the *Empire Patrol* Disaster”. [personal communication via email, 19.03.2018].

#### 4. Trauma, memory and narrative: Concepts in dialogue

Over the past 50 years or so the study of personal narratives of traumatic experience such as those I have been dealing with has flourished as part of a surge in studies of oral history and of memory linked to the development of reflexive and critical thinking, mainly in reference to the traumatic events of World War II. Scholars have realized that there was a lack of sources regarding relatively recent history. They have also understood the need to take oral testimony more seriously into account, as such testimony often reveals different and important interpretations of various events, which had been overlooked or intentionally obfuscated. Oral narration, of course, relies on memory and so the development of oral history and memory studies proceeded hand in hand. Paul Thompson’s seminal work, *The Voice of the Past – Oral History* (Thompson 1978), regarded oral history as a more democratic record of the past and pioneered it as a research methodology in the social sciences. The writings of Italian historians, Alessandro Portelli (1991, 2004) and Luisa Passerini (1979), showed the subjective and creative dimensions involved in remembering and in narratives of personal experience. By juxtaposing the “narrated self” (at the time of the event) and the “narrating self” (at the time of the telling), Portelli concluded that remembering does not simply involve drawing information stored. Rather, it is a creative process during which these different selves are in dialogue.

It is not by coincidence that during the same period, namely from the 1970s onwards, anthropology started going through a phase

involving the reflexive and epistemological critique of the methods anthropologists had been using to conduct research and to write their ethnographies. George Marcus and Michael Fischer, among others, have demonstrated a deep change in the methodology of fieldwork, which has been rendered reflexive, dialogical and collaborative (Marcus & Fischer 1986). A more 'democratic' ethos, with respect to the perceptions and feelings of our interlocutors as informants are now increasingly called, expresses the attention paid to their interpretations of the past which do not come "from the top" but are "grassroots". The traumatic experience of World War II, with the Holocaust playing a major role in it, has turned researchers' attention to people's testimonies<sup>6</sup>. Victims of such traumatic experiences, "not of their own making", as Paul Boyatzis comments on the first page of the Castellorizian shipwreck website, thus become "witnesses and speaking subjects of history ... and granted for the very first time, historical authority, that is to say *semantic authority* over themselves and others" (Felman 2002: 127, *apud* Papailias 2005: 36).

The "trauma" I have explored in the analysis of the Castellorizian personal narratives relates more to what Veena Das has described as a "critical event", in order to refer to "events that bring into being new modes of action and redefine traditional social categories" (Das 1995, *apud* Papailias 2005: 35). This critical event makes up the common property of the "shipwreck generation" (*genia tou navagiou*), as the narrators themselves refer to their group<sup>7</sup>. As their narratives show, the Castellorizian refugees and survivors of the shipwreck have reinterpreted their plight in the light of their collective survival and have added this experience to the content of the collective myth and ideology of their group in Australia. Up until this point, the collective myth was articulated by the Castellorizian elite and

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<sup>6</sup> In Greece, Riki van Boeschoten and Loring Danforth, among many other scholars, investigated instances and effects of the Greek Civil War, which followed WWII and divided Greek society in many towns and villages, with destructive effects (Van Boeschoten & Danforth 2015).

<sup>7</sup> German political sociologist Karl Mannheim's term "historical generation" refers to people sharing the same local identity, who may be of different age but have experienced the same events and gone through the same social processes together (Mannheim 1952: 292, *apud* Chryssanthopoulou 2022a: 87-88). This term may aptly describe the members of the "shipwreck generation", who have demonstrated that they possess a "collective memory" of the critical events leading to their traumatic experiences, and of the traumatic experiences per se.

stressed excellence of entrepreneurial and professional skills for men and emphasis on home and family for women, as well as commitment to the Orthodox religion and to community leadership for the entire community. The Castellorizian survivors have redefined this myth to shift public attention to the resilience and courage which inspired them to overcome life-threatening difficulties and to succeed in reconstructing their lives in their new homeland. This Castellorizian narrative of uniqueness and excellence, now complemented and transformed, was then disseminated through Australian society by the mass media (Chryssanthopoulou 2003; Chryssanthopoulou 2015 [2009]).

French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs first spoke of “the social frames of memory” (1925) and of “collective memory” (1950) to refer to the collective construction of our personal memories: “In reality, we are never alone”, he wrote. “It is not necessary for others to be present, because we always carry within us a multitude of other people” (Halbwachs 2013: 47-48, *apud* Chryssanthopoulou 2022a: 75). This is certainly the case for the narrators of the traumatic experience of the shipwreck, both in my oral recordings and on the website. Since my interlocutors were children at the time of the shipwreck, they repeatedly asked their parents and other older relatives whether they remembered things correctly. Evangelos Chatziyiannakis, very young at the time of the shipwreck, succinctly expressed the idea that his personal memory was in fact collectively formed, and, specifically, a “family memory” (Assmann 2006; Assmann, A. 2008)<sup>8</sup>. As he said to me, his own memories were mixed up with his grandfather’s, those of both his grandmothers, his mother’s, his father’s, and his older brother’s (Chryssanthopoulou 2022a: 318).

Pierre Nora (1989) looks at sites or realms of memory in relation to history. As he puts it, “there are lieux de mémoire because there aren’t milieux de mémoire”. He compares and contrasts “true memory”, which is embodied, collective, yet individual, and manifests itself in the concrete, to “memory transformed by its passage through history”, which is voluntary,

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<sup>8</sup> Of Aleida Assmann’s four types of memory, two, “national/political memory” and “cultural/archival memory” (Assmann 2006; Assmann, A. 2008) correspond to Jan Assmann’s “cultural memory”, *i.e.* the kind of memory which extends the knowledge of such events in time and is expressed through lieux de mémoire, such as the *Empire Patrol* website.

no longer spontaneous, individual and subjective, “duty-memory”, which is retained and expressed by “memory-individuals” (Nora 1989: 7-16). Thus, lieux de mémoire are “moments of history torn away from the movement of history, then returned; no longer quite life, not yet death, like shells on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded” (Nora 1989: 12).

The website examined here certainly functions as a lieu de mémoire for the Castellorizian diaspora community primarily in Australia, albeit also worldwide. It clearly expresses its creators’ anxiety over ensuring the preservation of the traumatic experiences of the Castellorizian refugees during and immediately after World War II for their descendants and for the Australian public, of which they are now part. However, the website is not merely a self-referential project. It is a third space, in which narrators and visitors demonstrate feeling and emotion and express Castellorizian belonging. It is a community of learning through sharing.

This emphasis on sharing their memories started with the way in which the creators of the site recorded these memories. Paul Boyatzis, a survivor himself, interviewed other survivors of the shipwreck, such as Katina Verevis or Arthur Athans. There were other interviewers, too, who were not survivors themselves, such as Allan Cresswell, one of the website’s creators. Some contributors to the site sent their testimonies as texts. However, the prevailing feeling was that this was the survivors’ own project, an enterprise in which survivors, while collectively remembering those who died, also celebrate their own endurance and survival. Carl Lindahl’s project, in which Katrina survivors interviewed one another, rested on the principle “to make survivors the leading agents in their own recovery”, thus retaining “ownership of their own stories” (Lindahl 2017: 2-3). Although recordings for the Castellorizian website were made many years after the traumatic event itself, this project prompted the shipwreck survivors to “create a new community” (Lindahl 2017: 17), in which they shared their memories and feelings for posterity but also for their own therapy<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Amy Shuman explores the process of making personal experience larger than personal, and some of the risks it entails for researchers as “it is in the process of transvaluing the personal to the more-than-personal (human, shared, universal) that narrative sorts out the relationships and obligations among participants” (Shuman 2006: 150).

## 5. Digital orality in a community website:

### New context, new meanings and public appeal in third space

I would now like to focus on aspects of orality involved in this website and how these contribute to fostering a sense of communal belonging among the Castellorizians.

The main mover behind the website, Paul Boyatzis, and his co-creators, Nicholas Pappas and Allan Cresswell<sup>10</sup>, endeavored to represent the circumstances and history of the event as clearly and based on history as far as was possible. They organized the site into the following chapters: *Introduction*, *Castellorizo*, *Italian Days*, *The Odyssey* (referring to the German bombings and evacuation of the inhabitants of the island), *Camp Life* (about two years in Nuseirat, Palestine), *Heading Home* (the fatal trip of the *Empire Patrol*), *Rescue*, *Repatriation* (back to Port Said), *Return to Castellorizo* (of a number of survivors), *A New Life* (for those who migrated to Australia, to join their relatives), *Commemorations* (held in Perth to remember those who lost their lives and to give thanks to God for their own survival), *Perished* (names and some photographs of the victims), *Contributions* and *Sources*. They included photographs of the refugee and of the shipwreck experience. The chapter on *Commemorations* shows how this traumatic event became gradually integrated in Australian Castellorizian community history, and later in transnational Castellorizian history. The latter is documented on the website through the demonstration of joint projects between the Castellorizians of Perth and the Municipality of Castellorizo, involving the memorialization of the shipwreck (such as a marble monument, joint memorial services, etc.).

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<sup>10</sup> Allan (Agapitos) Cresswell is the webmaster, mainly responsible for the site management and for the story layout and design together with Paul Boyatzis. Nicholas Pappas was historical consultant and supplier of documentation together with Paul Boyatzis, survivor of the shipwreck.



Figure 3. [www.empirepatrol.com](http://www.empirepatrol.com) homepage  
(Source: <http://empirepatrol.com/index.htm>)

The website project, however, had a broader long-term goal from the beginning beyond preserving memory, namely, to disseminate important elements and symbols of the past, values, and practices among the descendants of Castellorizian migrants. And it has achieved this goal. As mentioned earlier, the shipwreck generation managed to add its own perspective and symbols to the Castellorizian community myth and charter of being. According to Pierre Nora, a historical generation is a lieu de

mémoire in three senses: it is material in virtue of its demographic content; it is functional, since memories are transmitted from one generation to the next; finally, it is also symbolic, “since it characterizes, by referring to events or experiences shared by a small minority, a larger group that may not have participated in them” (Nora 1989: 19). Such is clearly the function and symbolism of the shipwreck generation for the Castellorizians.

The *Empire Patrol* website originally had a guestbook, in which readers could leave their comments and stories<sup>11</sup>. The following two examples of comments left in the guestbook indicate the empathy and the interaction on the part of younger Castellorizians with the content of the narratives, thus demonstrating the function of the website as a community of sharing and belonging among the Australian-born Castellorizians. The first example, published in the guestbook on 5 September 2010, comes from Elizabeth (Zambetta) Exindaris from Melbourne. She congratulates and thanks the site’s creators for providing the historical data which allowed her to learn what had really happened to her grandmother and great grandmother who had perished in the shipwreck. She also mentions that the website “was a beautiful father day’s present for [her] father who remembered his mum and his family”.

The following comment illustrates how this website is also enriched with testimonies from Australian-born Castellorizians. In a story which Tina Panigiris, from Sydney, left in the guestbook on 11 August 2011, she mentions a heroic act carried out by Despina Mavrou, her husband’s aunt, whom I, too, had met during my early fieldwork on Castellorizo. Despina was on the *Empire Patrol* with her sister, Elizabeth, who left her six-week-old baby on the burning boat, as she gave up trying to penetrate the flames and smoke. In seeing this, Despina went back to look for the baby, found it and put it in the front of her dress, which she lifted up and gripped with her teeth to form a pouch. “They were both saved, and I’ve heard this story many times in my thirty-year marriage to my husband [...] with sadness for the lives lost, but with admiration for such a strong woman as Thea [Greek for “aunt”] Despo”, she writes.

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<sup>11</sup> This guestbook is no longer accessible. However, I was lucky enough to print and so be able to use much of its interesting material in my book, thus preserving this interactional aspect of the website.

Can this website generate a sense of empathy in its readers analogous to that developed by people who listen to oral narratives? Walter Ong stresses that community is created orally and draws attention to audience as a prerequisite of such communication. "Readers cannot be considered as a united group, as if they were listeners", he claims (Ong 1982: 74). He also refers to the loneliness of both reader and writer, as "the extratextual context is missing not only for readers but also for the writer" (Ong 1982: 102). Elsewhere, however, he refers to "secondary orality", "brought about by telephone, radio, television and various kinds of sound tape", which can "foster a communal sense" among people (Ong 1982: 136), although in these cases, too, context is not obvious.

Regarding the existence of "context", I would like to observe that in communally generated websites, which are the creation of historical generations, such as the *Empire Patrol* website, visitors come across a collectively generated version of the (traumatic) story and indeed, often recognize the people who have provided the narratives. They may thus use their own memories or their imagination creatively to reflect on and identify with the experiences described by the narratives. Similarly, the contributors to the website can expect and imagine the kind of readers they are likely to have, i.e. mostly Castellorizians of younger generations and individuals generally interested in history.

New context is created on the shipwreck website, which is partly visible and generally imagined (Anderson 1983). This new community, potentially sustainable, includes the writers, namely the Castellorizian survivor narrators, two members of the *Empire Patrol* crew, who have also provided their versions of the story of the shipwreck, and the readers, mostly members of the younger generations of Castellorizians, who fall into two categories: those whose ancestors were involved in the shipwreck, collectively self-defined as "emotional survivors" of the shipwreck; and those who did not have any close relatives in the shipwreck. They all expressed their gratitude to the creators of the website and urged other Castellorizians to add more testimonies to the site. In one such comment published in the guestbook on 31 March 2010 Eva-Michelle Koutsoukos from Perth, named after her sister, Evdokia, who had perished in the shipwreck at the age of eight, writes "on behalf



of those of us who were not born at the time, yet were so affected by the *Empire Patrol* disaster, in one way or another, by the tragedy it brought to our families". She expresses her gratitude especially to Allan Cresswell "for the thousands of hours he has put into this huge project" so that "we, the 'emotional survivors' of this disaster [...] may have some history to pass on to our grandchildren".

Moreover, other Australian-born Castellorizians although they had no relatives involved in the shipwreck, were nevertheless eager to learn about the event and also visited the website. They could be said to represent the category of individuals who develop "affiliative digital postmemory", to adapt Marianne Hirsch's term "affiliative postmemory" to memory created through people's communication in a digital environment. Affiliative postmemory refers to the identification with the traumatic family memories of other contemporaries developed by those people who do not have such memories from their own ancestors (Hirsch 2008: 114-115). Let us look at the following examples of such cases in the guestbook. The first one, published on 30 October 2010, comes from Victoria Kazaglis Gallagher, from Sydney: "Thank you for keeping the history alive. Without you keen historians our heritage would be lost with time. Thank you for the pleasure you have created by finding out about our past", she writes.

The second comment, published on 23 November 2011, comes from a non-Greek, Mike Baillie, from the U.K. It demonstrates an interest in the website on the part of a wider public: "Thank you all for allowing me to solve a mystery that has been with me since visiting your beautiful Island under unusual circumstances in Feb. 1979. May you and your families enjoy peace and happiness for all the generations to come, which you so richly deserve. God bless you. Mike". "IN ARDUIS FIDELIS"<sup>12</sup>.

The website includes photographs of Castellorizian refugee lives and of the shipwreck. Sight, as Jill Bennett has argued, is deeply connected to "affective memory". "The viewer feels rather than simply seeing the event ... Bodily response thus precedes the inscription of narrative, or

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<sup>12</sup> 'IN ARDUIS FIDELIS', the Latin motto of the Royal Army Medical Corps, translates as 'Faithful in Adversity'. This suggests that the author of this comment may have been connected with the RAMC.

moral emotion of empathy" (Bennett 2005: 36, *apud* Hirsch 2008: 117). The website also contains texts and photographs depicting commemorative services held in 1985, 1995, 2010, 2015 and 2020 for those lost in the shipwreck, which several members of the Castellorizian and of the wider Greek and Australian communities had attended. Finally, the site also contains poems composed by various people expressing through verse views and feelings about the event. All these visual and textual depictions of events relating to the traumatic shipwreck and its memorialization form a familiar context for visitors to the site. Poems written on the subject of the shipwreck add to the oral aspects of the website. Such an example is a poem entitled "Empire Patrol", composed by an officer serving in H.M.S. *Trouncer*, the British aircraft carrier which rescued most of the refugees from the sinking ship. The images and the emotions of the rescuers and the rescued are expressed strongly in this first verse, included in the section "Poems":

"S.O.S! S.O.S! I'm on fire, she flashed  
And the *Trouncer* slews round and away she dashed  
To the scene of the tragedy miles away  
Where many were lost on this luckless day  
Poor *Empire Patrol*".

The creators of the site and the narrators quoted in it knew each other and already formed a group before undertaking the memorialization of the shipwreck, as Paul Boyatzis had written to me. Several of them had shared experiences which were later recorded on the website. The following example derives from a website narrative by Maria Chatzikyriakou, née Papanastasiou, which can be found in the chapter "A New Life". She talks about her memories of Paul Boyatzis' s post-traumatic reactions during the journey to Australia on the *Misir*, where they were both passengers. She remembers his distress whenever the ship's foghorn sounded, as this reminded the then ten-year-old of the sinking of the *Empire Patrol*. "I remember comforting him on more than one occasion when Paul thought that the sounding of the *Misir's* horn signalled its sinking", she writes.

In another text contributed by John Michael Papadimitriou, Emeritus Professor of Medicine at the University of Western Australia, one reads a description of the arrival of the shipwrecked refugees in Port Said, as John Michael experienced it as a young member of the Castellorizian community in Port Said. Papadimitriou's and Boyatzis' paths crossed first in Egypt and then in Australia. In the chapter entitled "Repatriation" Papadimitriou describes his visit with his grandmother and his aunt to the camp where the survivors had been brought to take them food and clothes. "Several children, yelling at each other, ran like ferrets and gathered the various scattered parcels", he writes. He remembers his first acquaintance with one of those survivors two years later. "He was a boy of roughly my age with a mop of black hair and rosy red cheeks. He came from Kastellorizo to the school that I was attending (in fact the same class) and stayed in Port Said for a few weeks." The boy recounted a little of his experience of that night in September 1945 and mentioned that he was on his way to Australia. "That boy was Apostolos (Paul) Boyatzis. In 1956 I met Apostolos again. At that time both he and I were studying Medicine at The University of Western Australia. He has been my friend ever since", the narrator concludes his testimony.

Performative elements are generally present in oral narratives, as the narrators consciously or subconsciously attempt to involve the listeners in their story. In the oral narratives of the shipwreck I recorded, the performative elements were clear and abundant. My interlocutors raised and lowered their voices, paused and gestured according to what they wished to stress or dismiss from their accounts. When Despina Misomike, then a child, reached the point where she referred to the loss of her older brother, Andreas, in the rough sea, she stopped, obviously moved, and pointed at the family photograph on the wall in which he was included. Then she mentioned how her mother, when she heard that a car carrying the corpses of those drowned, was passing by, jumped off the train on which the survivors were travelling and started running towards it, in a desperate effort to see her son again (Chryssanthopoulou 2022a: 311). While singing the narrative song (*rima*) of the sinking of the *Empire Patrol* that his mother had composed, another interlocutor, Spyros Houlis, broke down as he reached the following verses: "And

you, Mother of God of Paleokastro, with your church high up on the hills/ help us by sending a boat to our rescue". At that point, noticing that Spyros was deeply affected, I asked him to stop singing the *rima*, so he recited the verses orally for me (Chryssanthopoulou 2022a: 332-333).

Compared to the more organized structure of the website narratives, my interlocutors were given more space to narrate their experiences and focus on matters that they considered important. Such an example was the narrative of the shipwreck provided by Evangelos Chatziyannakis. He first gave me a lengthy account of his family's origin and involvement in the liberation of Castellorizo from Ottoman rule, thus recreating a context for the *Empire Patrol* experience both for himself and for me. I therefore grasped how embedded in his family history the traumatic event was. He told me about his father, who had served as a doctor in the refugee camp, and about his mother, who came from a prominent Castellorizian family of Egypt and had experienced a religious vision just before the fire broke out on the *Empire Patrol* (Chryssanthopoulou 2022a: 318-325).

Although we do not know the context of the website narratives, save that they were recorded by other Castellorizian survivors or members of the website team, we may still be able to discern performative elements in them, characteristic of oral speech. In fact, some of the narratives are so vivid that one may visualize the narrator telling the story. In his website narrative Arthur Athans, from Perth, talks about his experience of the fire on board in the chapter entitled "Heading Home". He was very young and during the shipwreck cried continuously, not knowing what had happened to the rest of his family. He talks of the heavy smoke that prevented them from seeing what was happening at the back of the ship, about the strong wind that forced the fire towards them and how they all kept going forward "until we reached the last step where ironically the little British flag was waving". Some passengers encouraged him to jump from the ship: "It was so high ... I was afraid and declined by crying continuously." Then the officer and others prepared a rope ladder and tried to lower him down to the sea: "Half-way down, the wind was blowing the ladder and me away from the ship and hitting me back on the hot metal of the ship. Quickly the officer and others pulled up the rope ladder with me holding on, back on board."



Figure 4. The *Empire Patrol* on fire  
(Source: <https://www.empirepatrol.com/rescue.htm>)

Jack Goody introduced the term “lecto-oral” to talk of the influence of the written upon the spoken word in literate cultures (Goody 2010: 42). He suggests that writing sometimes encourages orality “by continuing to view ‘real’ knowledge as knowledge which though in origin written, has to be produced orally on demand” (Goody 2010: 161).

“Digital orality”, as this “convergence of oral and written attributes on digital platforms” is termed, “highlights an adaptability of oral traditions to new technological forms, forming in essence a secondary, meta-orality, demonstrating both orality’s fluidity and literacy’s permanence” (Kaplanoglou, Katsadoros, & Zafiropoulos 2024: 14). This is certainly the case with the personal narratives of traumatic experience of the *Empire Patrol* shipwreck, if one considers the oral accounts that their narrators provided. These narratives are mediated through writing and their visual appearance on the website. As early as 1982, Walter Ong claimed that “chirographic cultures regard speech as more specifically informational than do oral cultures, where speech is more performance-oriented ...” (Ong 1982: 177). A few years later, geographers such as Henri Lefebvre (1991), Edward Soja (1996, 2009) and Homi Bhabha (1994), and anthropologists such as George Marcus (1998) and Arjun Appadurai (1996) talked about “third space” and “spatiality”, namely about space as relational, constituted by people’s positions and relations in it. Spatiality, linked to the conditions of modernity, is demonstrated by the deterritorialization of people’s

identities, as they move physically and imaginatively in today's globalized world. Third space characterizes both diasporas and the digital media connecting them, such as community websites.

As Sandra Ponzanesi puts it, diasporas allow both for bonding, thus strengthening ethnic encapsulation, and for bridging, thus creating possibilities for cosmopolitanization by forming bridges to other groups and communities. Digital media express both these forms of connectivity simultaneously (Ponzanesi 2020: 979-980). Such is the case of the shipwreck website, which creates relations in its digital space and appeals to Castellorizians and non-Castellorizians alike, as we have seen. As I have attempted to show through various examples, survivors' digital narratives are able to appeal to the emotions of their readers. This is understandable if we view affect and emotions "as practices that are always embodied and mediated" (Pink 2009, *apud* Ponzanesi 2020: 989; Scheer 2012). In fact, diaspora itself is fruitfully conceptualized "not in substantialist terms as a bounded entity" [...] and is used as a category of practice, to make claims, to articulate projects, to formulate expectations, to mobilize energies, to appeal to loyalties ..." (Brubaker 2005: 12).

In the case examined in this paper, the diasporic 'shipwreck generation' mobilized their energies and implemented the project of memorializing Castellorizians' experiences of World War II, their refugee lives and the trauma of the sinking of the *Empire Patrol*, which was taking them back to their homeland.

## 6. Conclusions

In this paper I have attempted to examine the question of the transmission of a traumatic experience by focusing on the case study of the shipwreck of the Castellorizian World War II refugees while they were returning to Castellorizo, their island homeland, after the conclusion of the War. More specifically, I have focused on the survivors' memorialization of this traumatic experience and how they have made it an element of communal identity for all Castellorizians by creating the website [www.empirepatrol.com](http://www.empirepatrol.com), dedicated to the event. I have also demonstrated how this website has disseminated knowledge of this traumatic heritage to the wider public,

so that it has become part of Australian public memory and a bridge uniting diaspora and island Castellorizians.

I have examined the traumatic narratives which survivors have contributed to the website and compared them to oral narratives which I recorded concerning the shipwreck while I conducted multi-sited and longitudinal ethnographic fieldwork among the Castellorizians in Australia and in Greece. I discussed the transmission of factual and emotional content in both cases and have examined any similarities and/or differences existing in the two categories of narrative, oral and digitized. I have focused on the question of whether we can speak of “orality” in the case of website narratives and offered a positive answer to the question. The website narratives of traumatic experience of the Castellorizian survivors provide a new context for the visitor of the site, who can reconstruct the history and the personal and emotional experiences of the refugee condition, of the shipwreck and of the search for a new life in Australia, of these survivors. The bonds among the contributors, who are members of the Castellorizian community of Perth, are evident even to non-Castellorizians, since the contributors refer to each other in their stories. If we study the comments offered in the guestbook of the website, we witness its appeal both to the younger generations of Castellorizians and to non-Castellorizian readers. The profound thanks expressed by Australian-born Castellorizians towards the creators of the site testify to their need to remember their ancestors who were so affected by this disaster, and their gratitude for the knowledge that the website has provided them with, so that they may have “a history to give to their grandchildren”, as they say. The website has been instrumental in disseminating knowledge of the post-World War II cohort of Castellorizian migrants in Australian society that involved a background of shipwreck and refugee life. The values of strength and endurance in adversity displayed by those later refugee-migrants have been added to the myth and ideology of success, excellence and leadership held by pre-War Castellorizian migrants and their descendants in Australia and represented by their business and professional elite in Perth.

I have also attempted to demonstrate the advantages of employing multi-sited and collaborative methods to research community websites.

Indeed, the fact that I had conducted ethnographic research in Perth and had known most of the key contributors to the website enabled me to comprehend the site better. Its creators and contributors are identifiable members of the Castellorizian community in Australia. To study it, as researcher-ethnographer, I relied on my longitudinal and multi-sited ethnographic experience of the Castellorizians, both in Australia and in Greece. This experience allowed me to compare the oral narratives of the shipwreck to the digital ones of the website. Above all, my understanding of the lieu de mémoire-cum-community of learning that the website constituted was greatly enhanced through the valuable communication established between the creator of the website, Paul Boyatzis, and myself as a researcher<sup>13</sup>. This collaborative relationship sustained and encouraged me to develop my analysis of the memorialization of the shipwreck into a book, *Sites of Memory in Castellorizian Migration and Diaspora*. My book has pursued its own journey, contributing to the transmission of the Castellorizian historical and traumatic heritage to larger audiences, including those of university students and the wider public in Greece.

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