

Parallelotopia: Ottoman transcultural memory assemblages in contemporary art practices from the Middle East

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journals.sagepub.com/home/mss**Gabriel Koureas**

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Abstract

This article engages with the conversations taking place in the photographic space between then and now, memory and photography, and with the symbiosis and ethnic violence between different ethnic communities in the ex-Ottoman Empire. It questions the role of photography and contemporary art in creating possibilities for coexistence within the mosaic formed by the various groups that made up the Ottoman Empire. The essay aims to create *parallelotopia*, spaces in the present that work in parallel with the past and which enable the dynamic exchange of transcultural memories. Drawing on memory theory, the article shifts these debates forward by adopting the concept of ‘assemblage’. The article concentrates on the aesthetics of photographs produced by Armenian photographic studios in Istanbul during the late nineteenth century and their relationship to the present through the work of contemporary artists Klitsa Antoniou, Joanna Hadjithomas, Khalil Joreige and Etel Adnan as well as photographic exhibitions organised by the Centre for Asia Minor Studies, Athens, Greece.

Keywords

Istanbul, photography, Salonica, Smyrna, transmedial

This essay discusses contemporary visual artworks produced by artists working with Ottoman transcultural memories. Their transmedial work is characterised by the remediation – the representation of one medium in another (Bolter and Grusin, 1996: 338) – of photography and personal and archival memories to question current nationalist trends and conflicts in nations that were part of the Ottoman Empire. Such artists, as Andreas Huyssen (2018) has stated, provide an alternative voice ‘at a time when we experience a delusional renationalisation of politics in Europe and elsewhere’ and these artists’ practices ‘can open up an alternative horizon’. Their interventions can provide a lesson ‘in a non-identitarian way to be in the world’ (p. 1), and their works are selected for their potential to offer insights into the complex political and socio-cultural conditions in the countries of the ex-Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, these works provide a much needed understanding of the

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multiple layers of memory, both personal and cultural, that inform the histories of the region. To this end, I discuss the work of the Cypriot artist Klitsa Antoniou and her installation *Parallelotopia* (2012) at the Villa Kapandji, Thessaloniki, Greece, through which the entangled personal and cultural memories of Istanbul (Constantinople was officially renamed Istanbul in post-Ottoman Turkey), Thessaloniki and Asia Minor are remediated to reveal the transcultural exchanges among these places and their people. The film *Ismyrna* (2017) by the Lebanese artists Joanna Hadjithomas, Khalil Joreige, in collaboration with Etel Adnan provides an instance of a transmedial, memory assemblage. In other words, these are memories that are not just mere representations of the past, but also they consist of material and immaterial components that affect people's experiences today and enable the artists to reveal and complicate notions of belonging, postmemory and to construct subjectivities through transcultural traumatic memories.

These contemporary artworks are juxtaposed with the conversations taking place between the past and the present by looking at the introduction of photography in the Ottoman Empire during the late nineteenth century, and the establishment and exhibitions organised by the Centre of Asia Minor Studies, Athens, Greece in 1974 and 2004. The aim here is to create memory parallelotopia, spaces in the present that work in parallel with the past and, through the use of memory assemblages, enable the dynamic exchange of cultural, material and immaterial memories.

Art historically, the term 'assemblage' was coined by William Seitz for the 1961 Museum of Modern Art in New York exhibition, the 'Art of Assemblage'. Seitz (1961) described assemblage as the 'fastening together' of a variety of found and often very diverse material (frontispiece). Seitz (1961: 83–84) argued that the assembler, by juxtaposing material and associations, 'mingles attraction and repulsion, natural and human identification, ironic and naïve responses', thus creating 'a constellation of meanings' that can exist independently of the materiality of the totality of the artwork. As Julia Kelly (2008) has argued 'the anti-art function of found materials [carries] the potential to unravel the understanding of what art is for, becoming less an object of contemplation and poetic transfiguration than a tool for doing things' (p. 30).

The Deleuzian notion of assemblage, a 'multiplicity that is made up of heterogeneous terms' and which 'establishes liaisons and relations between them' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013: 96) serves in the case of Ottoman transcultural memories to address the heterogeneity of the ethnic communities that constituted the Empire and avoids the rigidity of other models that try to understand the structures of the Ottoman Empire. Instead, assemblage as Marcus and Saka argue can offer an alternative way of discussing the heterogeneous while preserving some concept of the structural. The time-space in which assemblage is imagined, is both stable and unstable, and infused with movement and change, its 'intent is to undermine such ideas of structure' by offering the possibility of expressing difference (Marcus and Saka, 2006: 102). For transcultural memory exchanges in the Ottoman Empire through photography and contemporary artworks, assemblage offers the possibility to move away from a model of looking at the totality of the Ottoman society through its constituent communities. Instead, assemblage provides the opportunity to discuss the mosaic, patchwork, heterogeneity, fluidity and transitory configurations of the Ottoman and ex-Ottoman societies then and now. As such, assemblage complements and moves forward debates on photography and memory as reenactments of the past through performances of memory (Kuhn, 2010) and photography as a circumstantial tension between the significance and resonance of photographs, in respect to circulations of photographic reproductions and exhibitions as modalities of public exposure (Nikro, 2019).

Parallelotopia I – photography in Istanbul in the late nineteenth century

Photography arrived in Istanbul in 1839, almost simultaneously with its introduction in Europe. In the years that followed, commercial photography studios owned by Greeks, Armenians and

Europeans (mainly French) flourished in the city. Most importantly, although there were few Muslim photographers during this period, the Ottoman sultans espoused the arrival of photography with great zeal. Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876–1909) stated, for example, that

Every picture is an idea. A picture can inspire political and emotional meanings which cannot be conveyed by an article of a hundred pages; therefore, I benefit greatly from photographs rather than written records. (Quoted in Çizgen, 1987: 22) He also stressed the importance of photography for the Ottoman Empire in relation to its representation through the European lens stating:

Most of the photographs taken for sale in Europe vilify and mock our well-protected domains. It is imperative that the photographs to be taken in this instance do not insult Islamic people by showing them in a vulgar and demeaning light. (Quoted in Deringil, 1993: 156)

The importance of photography for the Ottoman rulers was twofold: first, it aided control and containment of an Empire that was increasingly showing signs of unrest and revolt and, second, it provided an opportunity for dialogue with the West in demonstrating the modernity of the Empire, its progressiveness and the coexistence within its borders of the various ethnic groups of the Empire (Allen, 1984; Çelik et al., 2015; Ersoy, 2016; Gursel, 2016; Özendes, 1998; Shaw, 2009; Woodward, 2003). Sultan Abdulhamid II's albums provide an example of this. These albums, 51 in all, containing 1819 photographs, were given in 1894 as a gift from Sultan Abdulhamid II to the British and US governments. More than half of the photographs came from the Armenian studio of the Abdullah Brothers. The albums can be divided roughly into four categories: landscapes, historic monuments, scenes that depict educational, industrial and military developments, and ethnographic records of the inhabitants of the Empire in ethnic costumes. The albums attempt to reverse the Western Orientalism of romanticised landscapes inhabited by harem girls and inactive, sleepy men endlessly resting and smoking the *nargile*. However, there are several problems arising out of such a reading of the albums which I would like to address.

The agency of the photographers in question seems to be problematic. Although 70% of the photographs are from the Armenian photographic studio of the Abdullah Brothers, there is not a single photograph of Armenian subjects, landscapes or monuments, despite the fact that every other ethnicity in the Empire is represented in the albums. The Armenian community becomes conspicuous in its absence, especially if it is contextualised within the historical events that were taking place at the time, culminating in the Hamidian massacres of Armenians in 1895. Do the Armenian photographers by assembling these photographs for the Sultan deny a voice not only to their Armenian compatriots but also to themselves as well?

It is at this point that I would like to address the Deleuzian idea of the assemblage, and to make the connection between past and present. Deleuze sees assemblage in terms of processes of territorialisation and deterritorialisation. He defines an assemblage as a 'multiplicity that is made up of heterogeneous terms' and which 'establishes liaisons and relations between them'. This means the assemblage's 'only unity is that of cofunctioning: it is a symbiosis, a sympathy'. It is never concerned with affiliations, but rather with alliances, which Deleuze calls 'alloys'. Assemblage 'has both territorial sides, or re-territorialised sides, which stabilise it, and cutting edges of deterritorialisation, which carry it away' (Quoted in De Landa, 2006: 121). In light of this historical and theoretical framework, the photos of military schools, assemblies and drills in Sultan Abdulhamid II's albums are a demonstration of the military strength of the Empire dealing not only with external enemies, the Russians in this instance, but also in coping with the increasing unrest within the Empire itself (e.g. Greece in 1821, the Balkans in 1875). In fact, the album bindings and the elaborate framing of the individual photographs become an exercise in reterritorialisation that has the further effect of stabilising an increasingly destabilised Empire. Most importantly, seen within this

context, the actions of the Armenian photographers do not produce affiliations with the state, but instead construct a form of symbiotic coexistence that allows them to deterritorialise the bounded confines of the albums and framing of the photographs by providing the alloys, the raw material from which a form of coexistence can become visible through the medium of the photograph.

My other point of consideration is the aesthetic language that these images adopt. The art historian Wendy Shaw argues that the introduction of photography needs to be seen in relation to the field of representation in the Empire. The two most important characteristics of the latter were as follows: first, the absence of a tradition of perspective construction and second, the non-mimetic realism of manuscript painting which formed the primary medium of illustration before photography made the realism of the new medium entirely new in the Empire. Instead of replacing an existing tradition rooted in imitation, photography arrived in the Ottoman Empire contemporaneously with Western painting, thereby creating a new visual experience among practitioners and viewers alike. As a result, photography in the Ottoman Empire did not look to existing genres as did contemporary photography in Europe. Instead, it provided what Shaw (2009) calls the 'innocent eye', coupling the technology of photography with the nineteenth century positivist drive for information (p. 80).

What, then, were the cues from which Ottoman photography assumed its modes of representation if it was not painting and not a dialogue with European photographers? According to Shaw, by staging photography outside an imported aesthetic framework the Ottoman state adopted its ideological effect, while visually reinventing it for a new political context and shaping its own image rather than relying on the implicit imperialism of the foreign photographic record. Although Shaw's argument is plausible, I would disagree on several grounds.

The majority of Ottoman photographers either collaborated with, or were trained by European, and mainly French, photographers who settled in the Ottoman Empire.

Second, therefore, I would argue against Shaw's claim that the Ottoman photographers did not immerse themselves within aesthetic photographic debates and that they produced photographs which lacked such considerations. Ottoman photographers did in fact engage with their European counterparts, and their correspondence reveals their technical and aesthetic preoccupations, as well as their need to be seen as artistically and technically equal to them.

My main concern has to do with the political power of the images they produced in establishing an Ottoman modernity which was contingent on the production of certain ethnic stereotypes and certain spaces of the city. However, looking at the way in which these photographs were received in Europe – a number of them were exhibited at Universal Exhibitions in Paris, Vienna and Chicago – and taking into consideration that the majority of Ottoman photographers trained under European photographers, this does not seem to be the case. In a revealing exchange between the studio of the photographer Pascal Sébah and the editor of *Le Moniteur de Photographie*, published in Paris, Sébah complained about the difficulties they were facing in Istanbul with printing techniques, which lagged behind Parisian ones. In response, the editor of the journal wrote in his editorial page:

We know that for a long time there have been very good photographers in Constantinople. We are sure of this because of the beautiful examples which have been sent to various exhibitions by M. Sébah and M. Abdullah, including the latest methods being experimented with in France. We had not realised that the art of photography was so advanced in areas so far away from Paris (Editorial, *Le Moniteur de Photographie*, 15/09/1873 quoted in Çizgen, 1987).

The editorial works in various ways by both endorsing the techniques and composition of the photographers as well as creating a certain distance between them. In addition, it is important to note that the Ottoman photographers catered for two markets: the tourist market of visitors to Istanbul and their demand for photographs as souvenirs to take back home with them as evidence of their travels, such as images of cityscapes or the peculiarities of 'exotic' workers and dancers/performers, and the



Figure 1. Abdullah Frères Studio, *Hamal* (porter), photograph, late nineteenth century, Vazken Davidian's collection, with the kind permission of the collector.

local market, that was mostly interested in family portraits. Sometimes, the two disparate markets converged eliminating the boundaries between the two photographic genres (the tourist and the family portrait). In doing so, and this is the point I want to stress, photographic aesthetics reveal a different set of alliances, which are distinct from the narrative that the albums are trying to impose.

The way in which images travelled transculturally and transnationally through space and time during that period also attests to their deterritorialising forces. The Abdullah Brothers' photograph of the Armenian porter, *Hamal*, a studio image of one of the most iconic figures of Istanbul which was reproduced in postcards and souvenir collections of Istanbul since the introduction of photography, was published in *The Sketch* (London: 1896), following the Hamidian massacres that resulted in the killings of large numbers of Armenian *Hamals* in the streets of Istanbul (Deringil, 2009) (Figures 1 and 2). The title attached to the image by the British press, 'An Armenian Porter who has been Killed', attributes to the image a new agency, the representation of atrocity to a Western audience instead of the usual orientalising, ethnographic and often exoticising connotations that the image would have carried when sold to tourists in the streets of Istanbul. Another photograph by the Abdullah Brothers provides further evidence as to the deterritorialising potential that the image had, especially in view of the fact that following the Turko-Russian war of 1877–1878, and the increasing prosecution of the Armenian community, the Abdulhamid II regime imposed a series of censorship laws that prohibited the printing of the word *Armenian* in written publications, although the law did not apply to images (Yosmaoğlu, 2003). The postcard



Figure 2. Abdullah Frères Studio, *Pompier Irréguliers* (irregular firefighters), photograph printed on postcard by Max Fruchtermann publishing house, Vazken Davidian's collection, with the kind permission of the collector.

of a photograph of firefighters in Istanbul shows a group of men around the fire pump they used in their work. They pose outside, on the steps of a building which could be a church, in various poses. What is striking about the image is the actual manual pump that is placed in the middle of the photograph: the silver roundel depicts the Virgin Mary and Christ. Firefighters at the time were formed from multi-ethnic groups, each one associated with a mosque, church or synagogue in the city. The roundel on the fire engine denotes that they were part of a Christian group, either Greek or Armenian, but the cultural composition of the group testifies to a multi-ethnic group. The photograph, titled 'Souvenir of Constantinople, Irregular Fire Fighters' and sold as a postcard by the Max Fruchtermann publishing house, provides an instance of visual assemblage deterritorialising the surveying power of the Abdulhamid II albums through the alliances formed by the multi-ethnic group of firefighters to protect the religious sites of Istanbul irrespective of religious affiliations (Davidian, 2018). These alliances, or what Deleuze calls 'alloys' – the relations that various communities form within society – are aesthetically constructed around the 'alloy' of the Christian symbol placed in the middle of the photograph. The poses of the firefighters, although they might be contrived, display their sense of pride in performing an important job. Contrasted with the bent, burdened figure of the *Hamal* their erect masculinities become the bodily alloys through which the production of difference is visualised as contingent on the job they perform and the pride they take in doing so. The visual representation is not about the event but rather the connections that are produced. These connections are carried forth into the contemporary space with Klitsa Antoniou's installation *Parallelotopia*.

Parallelotopia II – Istanbul/Thessaloniki

Antoniou's installation was exhibited at the Villa Kapandji (30/11/2012–27/01/2013) where the Cultural Centre of the National Bank of Greece (MIET) is based in Thessaloniki. The exhibition worked in tandem with Orhan Pamuk's (2005) biography *Istanbul, Memories of a City* copies of

which were placed on old school desks at the beginning of the exhibition in order to erase visually and somatically, through the immersion of the visitor to the sounds of the city, Pamuk's memories of Istanbul through a series of interventions. However, this artistic intervention was not directed towards Pamuk's representation of the layers of memory of the history of Constantinople that he unfolds through the pages of the book, but rather, it was a gesture that attempted to establish a new relationship between the text and the viewer. This created an act of deterritorialisation, a disarticulation of the established nationalistic narratives of the Turkish and Greek Republics that furthers what Pamuk has already initiated in his book with the insertion of 200 or so photographs in the text.

These photographs, the majority of which are by the Turkish/Armenian photographer Ara Güler, provide the symbols through which the melancholic soul of the city of Istanbul is revealed to the reader in order to disclose the precariousness of cultural realignments and, more specifically, the emptiness and the void that was left behind after the demise of the multiculturalism of the Ottoman Empire with the establishment of the Turkish Republic. For Pamuk, the photographs in his memoir represent a projection of his own memory onto a screen – a statement that reminds us of Freud's notion of screen memories. According to Freud, these are not childhood memories as such, but memories about childhood. Important facts are not retained; instead, their psychic significance is displaced onto closely associated but less important details. Like dreams, screen memories are characterised by visual representability, similar to that of mnemonic symbols and images (Freud, 1974). It is exactly this visual representability that Antoniou's interventionist erasure brought to the visitor. Through the intervention of the artist, the multi-layered history of the city of Thessaloniki was revealed in tandem with the histories of other cities of the ex-Ottoman Empire, thus creating a memory assemblage that crossed physical and cultural boundaries to bring together once again two important cities of the Ottoman Empire by highlighting alliances and affiliations through the deterritorialising effect of a transmedial installation.

When exhibited at the Villa Kapandji, the installation worked in harmony with the house and its history within the turbulent past of the city with its own layers of history, memory and its communities – Jewish, Armenian, Turkish and Greek. The house was built in the 1890s for the industrialist and banker Mehmet Kapandji whose family was one of the most distinguished families in Thessaloniki, and they came to the city as part of the Sephardic community that left Spain in the fifteenth century. However, what distinguishes the family is that at some point they converted to Islam, something that was common during the period, and the people who converted were known as 'Dönme' (Baer, 2007). During the exchange of populations with Turkey in 1924, the family left for Istanbul and the house went through a number of uses, even serving as part of the German headquarters during the occupation of city. The architecture of the house, which was designed by the Italian architect Pierro Arrigoni, is in what is known as the 'eclectic' style, with art nouveau influences (Epaminondas, n.d.: 19). Through the history of the house and its owners as well as its eclectic layers of different architectural styles, transcultural memories are juxtaposed with the history of the city.

Antoniou's work engaged with the multi-layered history in order to invite the visitor to become an archaeologist who will excavate transcultural memories so as to reveal the parallel spaces and their temporalities, thus revealing traces of memory that are often related to traumatic events from the history of the city. Visitors were asked to tell their own stories in order to bring to light the city's memories, which are entangled with those of Constantinople and the fate of the Ottoman Empire. This rewriting of memory suggests its malleability and often the abuses that can be inflicted on it by selective remembering and forgetting as in the case of Thessaloniki which, until very recently, denied its Jewish and Ottoman heritage in favour of Greek nationalism (Mazower, 2005).

Through the doors of this room, the visitor was able to see the parallel spaces of the exhibition, the *Horizon Line*, through a series of 70 models with the eye resting on a vanishing point beyond the horizon on the sea that brought the many immigrants to the city. The models set up a dialogue with the photographs in Pamuk's book, uncovering through intricate constructions/deconstructions,



Figure 3. Klitsa Antoniou, *Horizon Line*, photograph from the installation *Parallelotopia*, Cultural Centre of the National Bank of Greece (MIET), 30 November 2012 to 27 January 2013, Salonica, Greece, with the kind permission of the artist.

memory spaces, sometimes familiar – a staircase, a dining room, a court yard – and objects associated with these spaces, in order to reveal their materiality as mnemonic devices and to create a dialogue with the photographs. The installation dissected three rooms in the building, thus creating a further dialogue between Constantinople and Thessaloniki by bringing to the visitor their transcultural exchanges (Figure 3).

One of the rooms includes *The Sound of Time is not Tick-Tock*, a video projection with sound and flashing lights, using digitally manipulated photographs by Ara Güler that Pamuk included in his book. The transmediality of the work produces an uncanny effect that disorients the viewer, allowing them to enter the hermetically sealed space of the photograph in order to become the eye of the photographer and participate in constructing the captured moment in time, so as to bring the still image and the memories associated with it to life. The flashing, erasing lights in between projections and the sounds that accompany them remind the visitor of the traumatic demise of the Ottoman Empire and work in a way similar to traumatic recall. The projections provide embodied glimpses into the past but never revealing the whole narrative. The visitor needs to process their bodily, affectual reaction to the projection in order to complete their own history of the city.

This, then, brings the visitor to the final somatic encounter with the city's traumatic past. In *Round Trip 2*, a bathtub is filled with black ink with an old typewriter placed on top of it, creating a further multi-sensorial encounter. The blackness of the liquid, recalling images of the abyss, and the phantom typewriter that keeps typing without producing any text that floats uncannily on the surface of the black ink, ask the visitor to imagine, to become secondary witness, like the children of the refugees from Asia Minor visiting their parents' homeland on the video projection above this macabre bathtub. This secondary witnessing becomes a prosthetic memory (Landsberg, 2004) for the visitor, like the photographs in Pamuk's book (Figure 4).

Parallelotopia III – revisiting the 'homeland'

Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer (2011: xviii) identify the 'unusual nexus between nostalgic and traumatic memory' that Jewish survivors and their descendants faced in their lives when they



Figure 4. Klitsa Antoniou, *Return Journey 2*, photograph from the installation *Parallelotopia*, Cultural Centre of the National Bank of Greece (MIET), 30 November 2012 to 27 January 2013, Salonica, Greece, with the kind permission of the artist.

visited the place where Hirsch's family lived before the Second World War. This awkward positioning of nostalgia and trauma is also present in the memories of those who lived in the Ottoman Empire and were forced to leave their homes following the demise of the Empire. In the 1930s, the Centre for Asia Minor Studies (CAMS), established in Athens, Greece, by Melpo Logotheti-Merlier (1890–1979) created an archive of oral histories and photographs from the Greek communities of Asia Minor which were expelled and resettled in Greece, following the population exchanges of 1924. These refugee communities according to Nicholas Doumanis (2013) began to speak of Anatolia and the 'lost homelands', which became 'sites of memory of enormous significance in Greek cultural life' (p. 11). Fiction, poetry, music and memoirs provided a space from which the memories of the 'homeland' could be kept alive not only for the refugees but also for the second and subsequent generations which identified strongly with the 'lost homelands' (Doumanis, 2013: 11).

In what follows, I will discuss the work of the CAMS through the exhibition they organised in 1974, *The Last Hellenism of Asia Minor*, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the population exchanges with Turkey. The catalogue was written by Melpo Logotheti – Merlier's husband, Octave Merlier. The dedication to the exhibition states:

[The exhibition] is dedicated to the Memory of the 2,150 lost settlements in Asia Minor, the millions of Greeks whose remains are still there, those who sacrificed their lives so that Asia Minor remains Greek, and those Greeks who dedicated their lives and work to transmit the Hellenism of Asia Minor. (CAMS, 1974: n.p.[All translations are mine])

The dedication emphasises the Greekness of Asia Minor, and the efforts of those who died there defending their land. However, the catalogue and the exhibition seem to contradict this overt demonstration of ethno-nationalism. The exhibition needs to be seen within the political situation in Greece and the hyper-nationalism of the Greek military regime, supported by the United States, that ruled Greece from 1967 to 1974. This situation resulted in the promotion of the memory of Asia Minor as one of catastrophe, and Turkey and its people to be seen as the greatest enemy for the Greek nation. Also importantly, the exhibition is situated within the personal and cultural memory of the Greek refugees who, as a group of people, lived in a transcultural world, sharing their lives with the other ethnicities that formed the Ottoman Empire, and who often witnessed atrocities committed by both sides during the last years of the Ottoman Empire. These cultural memory spheres of the Asia Minor populations often intersected and clashed when they arrived in their new country, which was largely monocultural and monotheistic; Greek nationalism defined the civilised 'Greek' in opposition to the irredeemably barbarous 'Turk' (Karayanni, 2004). This often resulted in the histories of Anatolian coexistence to not only be 'deemed as fictions but a cause for shame'. (Doumanis, 2013: 11).

The introduction to the catalogue written by Octave Merlier starts with three 'instances of memory', as he calls them, which provide a transcultural exchange of memories across France, Greece and Asia Minor. His first memory is when he arrived in Greece in 1925, a year after the population exchange was completed. As a Frenchman, he was faced with the political implications of France's unacceptable actions during the Greek–Turkish war, and during his visit to the island of Samos, he was confronted face-to-face with the recent facts of the events. In the small coffee shop, from where, he is informed, one can hear the cockerel in the morning from the Anatolian coast on the other side of the water, a group of men in local dress are having coffee. He asks them if he can take their picture, but by the time he sets up a new film in his camera, they are all gone. The only person who remains explains that all the men had recently arrived from Anatolia as refugees, and they blamed the French for what happened during the Greek–Turkish war. The man was asked to convey to Merlier that: 'We are not ethnographic specimens to be photographed. We are Christians, Europeans betrayed by our Christian, European allies who of course had no memory and were heartless' (CAMS, 1974: 18). A transcultural memory assemblage emerges in this instance. Like the ethnographic images of the Armenian photographs sold as postcards to Western tourists in Istanbul, which provided evidence of the presence of those who were erased from the cultural memory of the Ottoman Empire in its later years, the Greek men of Anatolia refuse to become ethnographic specimens, thus reclaiming their lost agency from the wounding that was inflicted on them.

Merlier's second memory which further exemplifies a transcultural memory assemblage is from 1922, while he was studying Modern Greek at the Sorbonne and hearing of the events in Asia Minor from three Greek students. Their professor who was present at the time was overcome by a 'deathly sorrow' (CAMS, 1974: 18). Merlier's memories of the First World War came flooding back to him and especially his determination to sacrifice his life when he was 20 years old for a better, just and peaceful world. He remembers feeling devastated by the savageness of the political passions at the time and the unheard-of injustice of the peace negotiations regarding the Asia Minor settlement, which sentenced to death one million civilians and expelled hundreds of thousands from the land of their ancestors in atrocious conditions. It was at this point that Merlier decided to

dedicate his life to the rebuilding of the Greek nation. Serving in the French army provided him with a sense of patriotism and also highlighted his responsibility for the mistakes and shame he felt arising from the events in Asia Minor.

The final memory is closely related to this shame and concerns a chance encounter Merlier had with a local shepherd while out on a walk with a group of friends. In finding out that Merlier was French, the shepherd expressed his disappointment at France's lack of support for the Greeks during the Asia Minor events. His feeling of disappointment was accentuated by the fact that there were deep bonds between the French and Greek nations going back to the Greek uprising against the Ottomans in 1821, and the events of 1922 left him feeling let down. He fought during the Balkan Wars and then later in Asia Minor and was injured four times. It was the memories of the war injuries and the wars he fought that provided the distinctiveness of his experience. He told Merlier, 'You wouldn't even know what war is' (CAMS, 1974: 20). It was only when Merlier told him that he had fought and been injured during the First World War that the man felt a bond of brotherhood with him and the French nation. The personal transcultural memories of war proved to be even stronger than the sense of disappointment and betrayal felt by the Greek man. It was exactly this French-Greek transcultural memory of war that informed the establishment and work of CAMS.

Merlier's three examples of transcultural memory lead him to declare that the exhibition catalogue does not contain any reminders of the atrocities of war. He writes: 'This is not because we forgot the atrocities, or we want to refute them. This is because we want to hope for a future of brotherhood and unity' (CAMS, 1974: 22). Merlier states from the outset that the research of the centre concentrates exclusively on the Greek populations that left Turkey, and it does not include any research on the Turkish population that lived in Greece, although he stresses both populations spoke each other's language as the peaceful and natural outcome of many centuries of coexistence:

If language was taken as proof of nationality many Muslims would have stayed in Greece and similarly, many Greeks in Turkey . . . [Both populations] had two homelands: the homeland of the Cross – or the Half Moon – and the homeland where many generations have lived in the past, and the remains of their ancestors are buried (CAMS, 1974: 23).

The idea of the homeland as opposed to the nation in this instance highlights the artificiality of the newly constructed nations of Greece and Turkey and their cultural memories. Instead, it is the transcultural memories and exchanges that provide the basis for a shared memory space.

The initial gathering of oral histories concentrated on the area of Cappadocia. Merlier introduces this work, which formed a large part of the exhibition, by stressing the bonds of intercommunal relations that existed between the Greek and Turkish populations of the area. This was also an area which did not witness the violence and atrocities of some of the other areas, like, for example, Smyrna. However, for Merlier, the violence of uprooting the populations from their homes and breaking the intercommunal bonds is as important as the atrocities that were committed elsewhere (CAMS, 1974: 43). Merlier points the reader towards one particular photograph. It is the photograph of two men, close to each other, their heads touching revealing a moment of intimacy (Figure 5).

We are informed that they are the Turkish imam named Idiris and the Greek blacksmith, Simeon Hadjithodorou, meeting in Cappadocia in 1952, 28 years after the population exchanges. Merlier writes, 'The Turks were crying during the departure of the Greeks with whom they had lived peacefully and in friendship for many years. However, the orders from the Great Powers were strict: nobody could stay behind'. According to Merlier, such images constitute 'an oasis of humanity and friendship in a desert of inhumanity and barbarism' (CAMS, 1974: 43). The story behind the photograph also provides further evidence of this. When they were reunited, Simeon stayed for 3 days at Idiris house. While there, an elderly man visited the house and expressed his

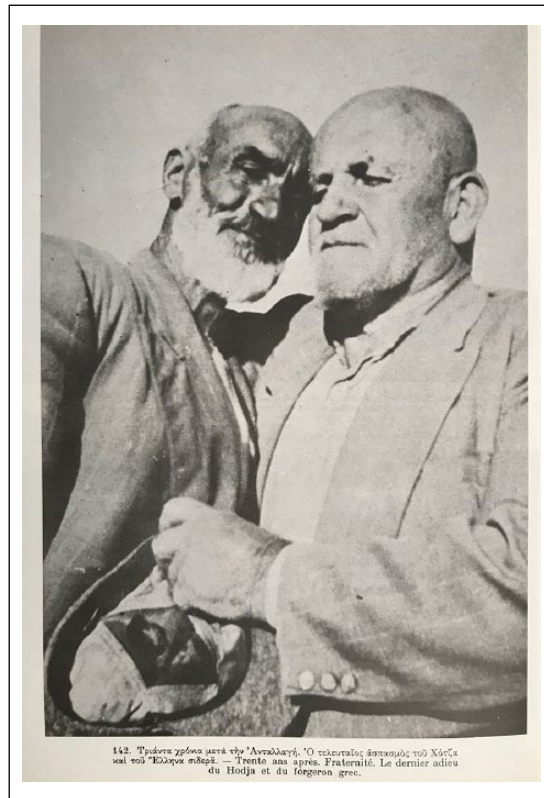


Figure 5. Anon, *Thirty Years After the Exchange of Populations: The last embrace of the Hodja and the Greek Balcksmith*, from the exhibition catalogue, *The Last Hellenism of Asia Minor*, CAMS, Athens, Greece, 1974, no.142, with the kind permission of the CAMS.

great satisfaction that he was still alive and able to meet Simeon. The main reason for this was that he could now repay a small debt he owed Simeon, for a sickle Simeon made for him. Because of the confusion during the population exchanges, he was unable to see Simeon before he left for Greece. For the old man, this small debt was a great burden which he carried with him for 28 years. Simeon kept retelling the story when he returned to Greece with a great sense of admiration and gratitude for his fellow countrymen (CAMS, 1974: 194). These affiliative transcultural memories provide the cutting edges of deterritorialisation that destabilise the territorial assemblage of the nation and its homogeneity, especially through challenging the notion of ‘the enemy’ that both nations were promoting at the time.

The photograph gives Merlier the opportunity to engage in a highly emotional address to the Greek and Turkish nations for cooperation, and the appeal for a symbiotic relationship as neighbouring countries (CAMS, 1974: 44). The photograph also gives Merlier the opportunity to describe other incidents of coexistence in the Ottoman Empire. Syncretic worship was one of these, but most importantly for Merlier, it was the relationships that syncretism gave rise to that reveal the deeply rooted transcultural exchanges between the ethnic communities of the Ottoman Empire which survived even after its demise (Barkan and Barkey, 2016; Bryant, 2016).

The story behind the photograph involves the Mayor of Gelveri, the son of a Turkish man and a Greek woman who received orders to demolish the Greek Orthodox Church, in order for a school

to be built. Having refused to obey the orders, he was imprisoned twice. He subsequently asked for a meeting with the district officer to explain his position. The district officer could not understand why the mayor kept refusing to demolish the church when there were no Greeks left in the town following the population exchanges. The mayor explained that, although he was a Muslim, his mother was Greek, and she had worshipped in this particular church. Before she died, she asked her son to preserve the church where she and her ancestors worshipped. As such, the district officer acknowledged the importance of the church and decided not to demolish it (CAMS, 1974: 193).

The exhibition catalogue provides a full account of the town of Gelveri through a series of photographs and biographical information. The family members are shown in various locations in Gelveri, and we are informed of their professional qualifications, relationships, and the fact that five to six Greek women from the area married Turkish men. Another photograph in the catalogue provides further insights into this transcultural exchange. The photograph titled 'Young Women from Cappadocia' (CAMS, 1974: No.63) shows three women from the back in ethnic costumes. All three wear their hair in braids. One of the informants, Ioanna Kouvaroglou, describes the importance of plaiting their hair, sometimes with 30 or 40 braids. They would pay a woman who specialised in this technique a yearly amount, so they have access to her services. Ioanna was one of these expert women who offered their service to brides and young women. The braids would often be decorated with silver or gold hair florins for special occasions such as weddings. It is at this point that we are informed that the three women in the photograph are actually Turkish, and not Greek. However, the catalogue goes on to state that 'this is how Greek women dressed their hair as well' (CAMS, 1974: 184). This transcultural fashioning of the hair provided a form of identity for the women of the Ottoman Empire that transcended ethnicity. However, on arrival in Greece, the women were subjected to an erasure of their identities. While in quarantine, their precious braids were shaved off. Ioanna goes on to state that the scenes she witnessed were beyond description. One of the women tried to jump into the sea to avoid the humiliation of losing her braids and another woman 'even died from sorrow' (CAMS, 1974: 185). The shaving of the braids was outlawed by the Greeks soon after this incident. What these instances strongly demonstrate is a gender identity that was created collectively by the women and that went beyond ethnic identities. It was an identity constructed through physical expression, the braids and the act of braiding symbolising solidarity and an affiliation with the multi-ethnic community where they lived (Figure 6).

Like the braids, landscape also provides a sense of belonging that goes beyond the confines of ethnic identities. Another publication produced by CAMS in 2004 provides further evidence of this, and also of the need of the refugees from Asia Minor to return to the land that they considered as 'homeland', despite the fact that they settled in a country that provided them with ethnic homogeneity. 'Prokopi/Ürgüp' is a collection of photographs taken by Stathis Alexiadis (1900–1992) in 1951, in the place where he was born and spent the early years of his life. He returned to his birthplace a quarter of a century after the population exchanges to capture with this camera his lost 'homeland'. Landscape has often been associated with notions of ethno-nationalism (Mitchell, 2002). However, the images collected in the publication strongly contradict this perceived notion of landscape. The landscape captured by Alexiadis provides in its empty eeriness a stage set through which transcultural memory exchanges take place. Alexiadis' own life story is similar to many other stories told by Ottoman subjects who were forced to leave their homeland. Born in 1900 at Ürgüp, the eldest son of the family, at the age of 14 he started running the family business because his father was sent into exile for having supported his Armenian friends during a period when such friendships were perceived by the Ottoman authorities as betraying the Empire. The difficult economic and political situation at the time forced Alexiadis to move to Greece in 1919 in search of employment. He supported his family in Ürgüp and gradually managed to bring them to Greece, before the exchange of populations. In 1951, he made the trip back to the place that



Figure 6. Anon, *Young Women of Capadocia*, from the exhibition catalogue, *The Last Hellenism of Asia Minor*, CAMS, Athens, Greece, 1974, no.63, with the kind permission of the CAMS.

throughout his life he had called his ‘homeland’. There he ‘relived the memories of his childhood’ and ‘cried in the arms of the Turks with whom he had grown up’. He ‘took photographs, notes’ and ‘tried to match the memories with the present, with what he saw before his eyes’. He ‘lived again in his mind’s eye their lively homes, the games in the neighbourhood, the hustle and bustle of the marketplace, the voices in the schoolyard’. This trip of a lifetime ‘filled him with tears for years to come’ (CAMS, 2004: 164). Place and locality provide spatial boundaries that according to De Landa territorialise the assemblage in order to increase its homogeneity (De Landa, 2006), but it is the transcultural memories that Alexiadis relives through his visit, the notes he made and the photographs he took, that work to destabilise the spatial boundaries that his ‘new country’ imposed on him and which excluded the Turkish people with whom he had shared his childhood. The photographs and notes, as well as his emotional response, work as the carriers of the transcultural memories that provided him with the will to live in a country that refused to acknowledge the possibility of such memories.

The task for Evangelia Balta, the editor of the collection of photographs for the publication, was to provide ‘words that would function as a prop to support the emotion’ felt by Alexiadis when he visited his ‘homeland’ (CAMS, 2004: 12). Balta quotes one of the CAMS interviewers to highlight the strong bond and emotions that the refugees felt for their homeland. They talked about their homeland ‘as if it was ‘there before their eyes, in an endless revelation’: ‘[t]hey took hold of the narration as if they were standing and watching a film in front of them or inside them, they were watching and functioning properly, almost impersonally, synchronised passion – vision – word – tone’ (CAMS, 2004: 13). Both

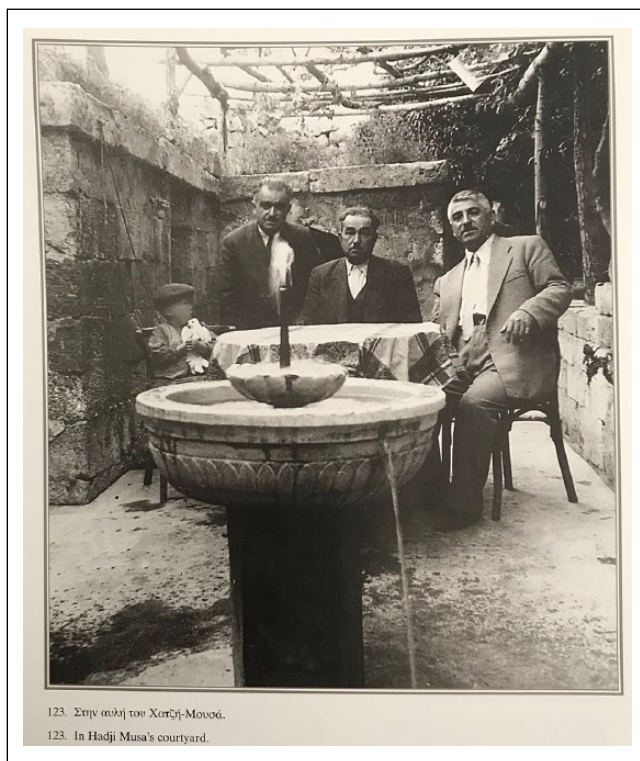


Figure 7. Stathis Alexiadis, Courtyard in the House of Hadji Musa, from the exhibition catalogue, *Prokopii Ürgüp*, CAMS, Athens, Greece, 2004, no.123, with the kind permission of the CAMS.

the photographs and testimonies are seen as imprinting lost landscapes, persons and buildings, as in the case of the photographs of Istanbul that Pamuk used in his memoir of the city that represented a projection of his own memory onto a screen and which Antoniou's installation then used to reveal the richness of transcultural memories between Istanbul and Thessaloniki. Alexiadis' photographic collection concludes with a photograph of himself in the courtyard of the house of his childhood friend, Hadji Musa, and Alexiadis' cousin (Figure 7).

A child sits on a chair holding a white dove. In the foreground, there is a fountain. It is the fountain from the demolished monastery of Saint Nicholas in the town of Sinasos. The transformation of the religious relic into an item of decoration can of course be seen as sacrilege, but in this instance, its transformation into an object to be looked at, admired, and which provides cooling respite during the hot summer days, transforms it into an object of personal transcultural memories and exchanges. The catalogue informs us that Hadji Musa died shortly after the photograph was taken. The photograph of their last reunion became for Alexiadis a memory assemblage that through its intimacy and emotional charge provided him with the possibility of transgressing the monoculturalism of Greece during that period.

Parallelotopia IV – Smyrna/Beirut

Second- and third-generation Ottoman subjects, who were forced to leave their communities following the dismantling of the Empire, like Alexiadis, feel the need to visit the places where their ancestors lived. These postmemories, as Marianne Hirsch (1997) has argued, are transmitted to the

generation that did not experience the traumatic event; they are 'a powerful and very particular form of memory its connection to its sources is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation' (p. 22). Although Hirsch's term *postmemory* refers to Holocaust memory, the term can easily be adapted to the Ottoman context, as the following discussion will reveal.

This need to return to a place they never lived but have only heard about through the constant retelling of stories from their parents or grandparents is the subject of a body of contemporary artistic output from the Middle East. Smyrna/Izmir, its destruction and the evacuation of its Greek, Jewish and Armenian populations, form the focus of *Ismyrna* (2017), a recent film by the Lebanese artists Joanna Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige in collaboration with Etel Adnan. The film provides a way of engaging with the postmemory transcultural exchanges of Adnan and Hadjithomas, who met in Beirut 15 years before they embarked on the film project. After leaving Beirut to study in Paris, Etel Adnan settled in California. Hadjithomas, a native of Lebanon, states that the bond, the alloy that brought the two together, 'was Smyrna, a presence, an absence, a fictitious territory' (*Ismyrna*: 2.20). The city was the birthplace of Hadjithomas' grandfather, Thomas Hadjithomas, who together with his three brothers and parents was driven out of the city in 1922 by the same army that Adnan's father served in as an officer. Smyrna was also where Adnan's father met and married his Greek wife. The evacuation from Smyrna was a story that Thomas Hadjithomas retold his family many times after the family settled in Beirut. For Joanna Hadjithomas, the story not only 'haunted his whole life' but also most importantly, it 'inhabited' the whole family (*Ismyrna*: 2.25). This domestication of the narrative resulted in it becoming part of their daily lives, their inner worlds and created a parallelotopia, that is two temporally synchronous and affectively parallel spaces where the family existed.

Neither Etel Adnan, Joanna Hadjithomas, nor their families, ever (re)visited Smyrna. Because Etel was no longer able to travel to Smyrna when the production of the film started, Joanna undertook the trip with Khalil Joreige, and the couple became Adnan's eyes. The film opens with the traumatic recalling of the scene of the destruction of Smyrna from the viewpoint of the 12-year-old Thomas. Through the darkness of the night, the fire that destroyed the city is visible in the archival documentary footage, and we can together with Thomas witness the destruction of the city. Thomas could not save anything, although his mother managed to hide a box of silver items which they had to sell once in Beirut in order to survive. Many years later, Thomas found the family heirlooms in a market in Beirut and bought them back. The lives of these people who flee catastrophe is encapsulated in a box that provides an anchoring for their lives, and also, like a Pandora's box, keeps their traumatic memories contained and manageable. Thomas would recall the images of the burning houses, the Turkish soldiers that surrounded them in the harbour of Smyrna, the darkness, and the people shouting and jumping into the water to escape the fires, the family getting into a boat, and rowing while having to push away the corpses floating around them, towards the French naval ship that will take them away from the catastrophe to their new home in Beirut.

The opening scene of the film, which uses archival material of the destruction and evacuation of the city, with its dark grainy footage, provides a stark contrast to the next scene which takes place in Adnan's light-filled Parisian apartment where her face is shown in close-up. The remediation of the archival film turns it into a 'deterritorialised image bank allowing for agency to emerge' (Brunow, 2016: 39) which here is brought to the viewer's attention through the expression of Adnan's face in her private space. They are discussing the Hadjithomas family's escape and the fact that a Turkish man helped the family to get into a boat. This act of transcultural collaboration frames the narrative of the film. The close-up shot of Adnan's face works as an insight into the deeply personal affectual encounter between the two women and their personal memories. Adnan talks about her parents who stayed behind after the Smyrna fires because of her father's military

position and of her mother speaking about the fires to her and how they were deliberately started in order to bring maximum destruction to the city and particularly its ethnic quarters – Greek, Armenian, Jewish (Eldem et al., 2005; Mansel, 2011; Tansuğ, 2018).

This incessant, obsessive remembering of Smyrna marked both Hadjithomas' and Adnan's upbringing. Hadjithomas' grandfather kept repeating the same story about Smyrna. Her father would often tell him to stop, but, after her grandfather's death, her father would repeatedly tell the same stories about Smyrna. For Hadjithomas, it is 'like we are not living fully in this country [Lebanon]' (Ismyrna:12.49). In her grandfather's house, they lived in a 'special world', they 'were somewhere else' (Ismyrna: 13.03). Adnan also felt that they 'lived in two worlds that remained apart', an 'imaginative world' through which she became who she was (Ismyrna: 13.15). A juxtaposition of archival film and still images of fashionable crowds in the streets of Smyrna blur into one another. Thus, further evoking the blurring of the two worlds in which the two women were raised. For Adnan, the lack of archival evidence about both sets of families means that retelling the stories signified survival: 'When they utter the word Smyrna, although I have not seen Smyrna, it's not devoid of meaning, I don't know what it is. It evokes something', as if 'there is a kind of magic operating' similar to when 'you are taking a photograph and the sun creates an effect' (Ismyrna: 14.29).

The archival footage from the promenade in Smyrna works in such a magical way. The camera follows the crowd walking on the promenade, but there is one particular moment when a man reverses and returns the gaze of the camera. His gaze, following the camera, creates this magical encounter between the camera and passer-by, which provides an uncanny exchange, drawing us, the viewers, further into the complications of remembering and transcultural exchanges.

The promenade is used again in another filmic assemblage following Hadjithomas' story of her grandfather's obsessive rebuilding of the contents of a safe deposit box, the contents of which disappeared after the destruction of Smyrna. The symbolical rebuilding of the contents of the box, and their lives, is represented by a red boat in the sea of Smyrna, the same colour as the boat that saved the family in 1922. The image of the boat flickers on the screen that keeps turning into a blank screen, and slowly reveals the boat and the city of Smyrna in the background, with the camera finally settling on a young couple walking along the promenade, interchanged with ghost-like figures appearing on the screen, including a newlywed couple. The ghost-like, shadowy figures almost dissolve into a simultaneous setting of the moon and sunset, which then reveals the city by night with its many flickering, almost burning lights. The camera is unsteady, making the city's night lights flicker even more intensely, reminding the viewer of the opening scene of the film and the fires that engulfed the city in 1922.

The promenade and its importance are further highlighted when Hadjithomas returns to Adnan's Parisian flat following her visit to Smyrna. As Hadjithomas starts showing Adnan images of Smyrna, Adnan is surprised at the beauty of the gulf, the ever-present sea that seems to surround the city, and at the fact that her mother did not mention the sea very much, although the sea promenade featured in her memories. For Hadjithomas, there was something restful about the promenade and the promenading crowds. The reason the promenade proved such a surprisingly comforting space according to Hadjithomas might have had to do with the fact that the memories transmitted down the two generations evolved around the trauma and suffering resulting from the evacuation from Smyrna using this same promenade. After the evacuation to Tunisia, the family lost one of their sons before finally settling in Beirut: 'So I arrived there with that idea ingrained in us, as if for years and years, we had been carrying a very heavy suitcase with everything in it, the stories that had been endlessly recounted to us' (Ismyrna: 35.10). The contrast between those memories and narratives and the tranquillity of the promenade provided the space of reconciliation of past and present, traumatic memories and survival, but, most importantly, for reaching one's destination

after refusing for many years to even visit the place where the trauma originated. This ‘absorbing of their parents’ sorrow’ is unexplainable as Adnan tells us, and the hesitancy and even refusal to visit Smyrna in the past could have been related to not wanting to be overcome by their parents’ sorrow (Ismyrna: 36.43). What Hadjithomas also finds astonishing is that although her family spoke incessantly about Smyrna, none of them ever visited it. ‘It’s the same as the dead’, Adnan tells us, ‘You can’t visit the dead, you see? You talk about them. It’s like going to a cemetery for a Greek person. You have absorbed their grief. It is a daily grief, it inhabits them’ (Ismyrna: 37.44).

Although one tries to rationalise this all-consuming grief by saying that this is ‘their grief and not mine’, it has the capacity to absorb somebody, ‘it even made me’, Hadjithomas tells us. This all-absorbing identity giving grief was too difficult to pull away from, because ‘it constituted our singularity’ (Ismyrna: 38.28). It is not nostalgia for Smyrna that ran through their families’ lives but possession. They were possessed by their loss, not for the physicality of the space but ‘the way of life, the moment of history’, the ‘story of a lost paradise’ (Ismyrna: 39.47).

Hadjithomas concluding the film contemplates what kind of memoir her father would have written. The sea and mountains of the gulf of Smyrna, form the visual backdrop to the unwritten biography and the mountains are almost abstracted by blurring and doubling the filming process. As she did not find the ‘metal box’ containing the tangible family memories, nor any letters or documents, what remained was the possibility of invoking those memories in the multilingual world which the family inhabited and which ‘symbolised those worlds in which we lived those fantasied identities, those mythicized singularities’. These imaginary lives can only be invoked ‘like those mountains which Etel spent her life painting, the mountains which she saw from her window in Sausalito, California, and which ‘strangely recall those of Smyrna which she has never seen’ (Ismyrna: 40.20). Hadjithomas’ closing remark is followed on the screen by an assemblage of Adnan’s mountain paintings.

Conclusion

The works discussed in this essay, like Adnan’s paintings of the Californian landscape which strangely demonstrate an affinity with the mountains of Smyrna, provide memory parallelotopia, spaces in the present that work in parallel with the past and which enable the dynamic exchange of transcultural memories. These memories are no longer territorialised within the confines of national borders but move beyond them and across temporalities to produce through their transmediality a constellation of meanings that can exist independently of the materiality of the artworks. They produce potentialities that shift present discussions of memory, the notion of the global and local, personal, political and cultural memories, in order to reveal a constellation of meanings, affiliations and connections. More importantly, they invite us to become archaeologists who will excavate transcultural memory exchanges, the parallel spaces they inhabit and their temporalities thus revealing traces of memory, which are often related to traumatic events and what appears at first as a perverse nostalgia for such instances. However, these works and the transcultural memories of violence and the resulting trauma of the uprooting of populations at the end of the Ottoman Empire provide the finite edges of deterritorialisation that destabilise the territorial assemblage of the nation and its homogeneity.

The transcultural memory exchanges that emerge here work to destabilise the imposed artificial spatial boundaries that created the countries of the Middle East following the end of the Ottoman Empire. These transcultural memories, as well as importantly the emotion and affect that such memories entail, provide possibilities of acknowledging the self and the other. The domestication of these transcultural memories can facilitate the creation of ‘home’ as distinct

from the nation, not only for the first generations but also subsequent ones as well. The ‘homing’ of transcultural memories results in creating a parallelotopia, two temporally synchronous and affectively parallel spaces which one could inhabit.

Like the inhabiting and domestication of the transcultural memories and the trauma associated with them, the remediation of the archival material in these works turns the archive and its territorialised boundaries into a deterritorialised image bank, allowing for a number of narratives and affiliations to emerge. This cinematic reality and the remediation of the archive free the artists and the viewer from the restrictiveness of space and allow us to transit from space to space. Unlike traditional landscape painting and recreation of the Ottoman past favoured by the current political regime in Turkey, this results in a fragmented, inconclusive sense of the landscape which is not void of meaning. It provides a memory assemblage where different memories can coexist.

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