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War, Postmemory, and Exhibition Design in Greece.

The "Asia Minor Hellenism: Heyday-Catastrophe-Displacement-Rebirth" Exhibition at the Benaki Museum (2022–2023)

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In this paper I critically discuss the commemorative exhibition "Asia Minor Hellenism: Heyday-Catastrophe-Displacement-Rebirth" (Athens, Benaki Museum, 15 September 2022 to 26 February 2023)[1]. The reference point of my exploration is Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory regarding cultural or collective traumatic events and experiences; the memory that a generation can have of "powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births, but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right"[2]. My analysis focuses on the selective management of collective memory through commemorative exhibition design and the shaping of national identity in contemporary Greece. Touching upon the historical discourse on the civilianization of war,

[1] Copyright notice: The photographs illustrating this paper were taken by the author.

[2] M. Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory*, "Poetics Today", 29, 1 (2008), p. 107. See also: M. Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*, New York, 2012, p. 5. On Hirsch's conceptualization of "postmemory" see also: M. Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*, Cambridge, MA and London, 1997; M. Hirsch, "Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory", in: *Visual Culture and the Holocaust*, ed. B. Zelizer, London, 2001, pp. 215–246; M. Hirsch and L. Spitzer, *Testimonial Objects: Memory, Gender, and Transmission*, "Poetics Today", 27, 2 (2006), pp. 353-383; M. Hirsch, *Connective Arts of Postmemory*, "Analecta Política", 9, 16 (2019), pp. 171–176.

I also bring forth the relevance of "affiliative postmemory" to current human tragedies of dislocated populations.

Hirsch originally defined postmemory, focusing on the inheritance of traumatic memories by the children of Holocaust survivors. Extending postmemory beyond familial networks ("familial postmemory"), she created the term "affiliative postmemory," significantly broadening the intergenerational transmission of collective traumatic experiences. Following Hirsch's broadening of postmemory from "familial" to "affiliative"[3], "familial" postmemories belong to those (in our case) whose relatives survived the 1922 Asia Minor Catastrophe, whereas "affiliative" postmemories differ since they are articulated beyond familial networks, making past traumatic events "more broadly available to other contemporaries"[4]. I argue that "affiliative postmemory," describing the connection to the traumatic past "mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation"[5], allows the concept's application within the framework of commemorative exhibition design. Drawing on Hirsch's concept of postmemory not as "an identity position, but as a space of remembrance, more broadly available through cultural and public, and not merely individual and personal, acts of remembrance, identification and projection"[6], I discuss exhibition design and the transmission of collective traumatic experiences strongly related to events of national significance. In this context, my analysis is informed by Hirsch's position that

> [p]ostmemorial work (…) strives to reactivate and reembody more distant social/national and archival/cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression. Thus less-directly affected participants can became engaged in the generation of postmemory, which thus persist even after all participants and even their familial descendants are gone.[7]

Focusing on the 1922 Asia Minor Catastrophe and the generation, and/or transformation of postmemory through the contents of the commemorative exhibition hosted at the Pireos Benaki Museum in Athens, I draw attention to commemorative exhibitions as prefabricated events embedded in cultural politics, aiming to shape specific notions of national heritage through acts of remembrance. In keeping with this outlook, I consider commemorative exhibitions as historical artefacts informed by the aspirations of the organizers and other stakeholders[8]; also, as "commemorative events typically planned with intentions of affirming and reinforcing memories that provide a sense of heritage and identity"[9], i.e., highly subjective, controversial concepts.

The exhibition "Asia Minor Hellenism: Heyday-Catastrophe-Displacement-Rebirth" was co-organized by the Benaki Museum and the Centre for Asia Minor Studies[10] to mark

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[3] M. Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*, New York, 2012, p. 22.
[4] *Ibidem*, p. 36.
[5] *Ibidem*, p. 5.
[6] M. Hirsch, "Projected Memory: Holocaust Photographs in Personal and Public Fantasy", in: *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, ed. M. Bal, J. Crewe, and L. Spitzer, Hanover, NE and London, 1999, pp. 8–9.
[7] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory…*, p. 111.
[8] See: W. Frost and J. Laing, *Commemorative Events: Memory, Identities, Conflict*, London and New York, 2013, p. 63.
[9] *Ibidem*, p. 1.
[10] The preparation of the exhibition had started in the fall of 2018. It included component events, such as lectures, film screenings, educational programs, and guided tours. The richly illustrated exhibition catalogue

the centennial of the disastrous defeat of the Greek army in the Greco-Turkish War of 1919–1922, which ended Greece's territorial aspirations in Asia Minor with the largest forced population exchange before the Second World War[11]. The Greco-Turkish War of 1919–1922[12] is commonly known in Greece as the 1922 Asia Minor Catastrophe, whereas in Turkish national historiography it is referred to as the War of Independence[13]. The war ended with a compulsory population exchange, according to the Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations and Protocol (30 January 1923), followed by the international Lausanne Peace Treaty (24 July 1923) and the establishment of the Turkish Republic[14]. Both signed in Lausanne, they defined the borders between Greece and Turkey, officially regulating their relations henceforth[15]. The most crucial condition of the Lausanne Treaty was the "unmixing" of populations, a term used by Fridtjof Nansen, League of Nations High Commissioner on Refugees, in his oral and written presentations to the delegates attending the Lausanne conference on 1 December 1922[16].

According to a bilateral agreement, approximately 500,000 Muslims and more than 1,200,000 Orthodox Christians were uprooted, reshaping the Greek nation's culture and collective memory, and affecting its economic development. Defining nationality on the basis of religion and forging nation-state homogenization, this massive compulsory dislocation of populations caused a severe humanitarian crisis, especially in Greece, and still remains a significant historical event in the collective memory of dislocated communities in both countries[17]. Onur Yıldırım underlines the "overtly state-centric" nature of the rapidly drafted Lausanne Convention, drawing attention to the institutional mistreatment of the civilians:

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and the accompanying volume of 32 scholarly papers were jointly published by the organizers in Greek and in English. See: E. Arapoglou, ed., *Asia Minor Hellenism: Heyday-Catastrophe-Displacement-Rebirth* [Exhibition Catalogue, Benaki Museum], trans. G. Cox et al., Athens, 2022 (hereafter: *Asia Minor Hellenism*, Exhibition Catalogue); E. Arapoglou, ed., *Asia Minor Hellenism. Essays and Reflections*, trans. G. Cox et al., Athens, 2022 (hereafter: *Asia Minor Hellenism. Essays*).

[11] See, for instance: M. Llewellyn-Smith, *Ionian Vision: Greece in Asia Minor 1919–1922* (1973), London, 2022; R. Gingeras, *Sorrowful Shores: Violence, Ethnicity and the End of the Ottoman Empire*, 1912–1923, Oxford, 2009; D. Pentzopoulos, *The Balkan Exchange of Minorities and Its Impact on Greece* (1962), London, 2002.

[12] For a summarized overview of the diplomacy and the war events that culminated to the 1922 destruction of Smyrna (Izmir), see: M. Llewellyn-Smith, "Greece in Asia Minor from Great War to Catastrophe: An Overview", in: *Asia Minor Hellenism*, Exhibition Catalogue, pp. 137–149. For an extensive account, see, for example: Llewellyn-Smith, Ionian Vision…

[13] See: E.G. Erickson, *The Turkish War of Independence. A Military History*, 1919–1923, Santa Barbara, 2021; K. Travlos, ed., *Salvation and Catastrophe: The Greek-Turkish War*, 1919–1922, Lanham, 2020.

[14] See: Winter, *The Day the War Ended…*, p. 52–66; Erickson, *The Turkish War of Independence…*, pp. 327–337.

[15] See: J. Conlin and O. Ozavci, eds., *They All Made Peace – What is Peace? The 1923 Lausanne Treaty and the New Imperial Order*, London 2023; Winter, *The Day the War Ended…*

[16] See Winter, *The Day the War Ended…*, p. 6 and footnote 10.

[17] See, for example: B. Clark, *Twice a Stranger. How Mass Expulsion Forged Modern Greece and Turkey*, London, 2006; O. Yıldırım, *Diplomacy and Displacement: Reconsidering the Turko-Greek Exchange of Populations*, 1923–1934, New York and London, 2006; A. Iğsız, *Humanism in Ruins: Entangled Legacies of the Greek-Turkish Population Exchange*, Stanford, 2018. See also: R. Hirschon, ed., *Crossing the Aegean: An Appraisal of the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange Between Greece and Turkey*, New York and Oxford, 2003; R. Hirschon, "History's Long Shadow: The Lausanne Treaty and Contemporary Greco-Turkish Relations," in: *The Long Shadow of Europe*, eds. O. Anastasakis, K. Aude Nicolaidis, and K. Oktem, Leiden and Boston, 2009, pp. 73–93; R. Hirschon, "History Memory and Emotion: The Long-term Significance of the 1923 of the Greco-Turkish Exchange of Populations", in: *When Greeks and Turks Meet. Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Relationship Since 1923*, ed. V. Lytra, Farnham, 2014, pp. 23–44.

> The decision-makers knew beforehand that the Convention, with its rudimentary nature, was bound to create a great many complications for the people who had no choice but to comply with the principles of this hastily formulated document. The key institutions that were created to implement these principles in both countries acted mostly upon the sovereign prerogatives of the political élite rather than the actual realities of the refugee situation[18].

With few exceptions, the Lausanne Treaty recognized for both countries religion as the only criterion for citizenship: "Religion trumped all other forms of collective identity"[19]. Jay Winter's statement that "at Lausanne, the civilianization of war became a principle of the fashioning of peace"[20] is decisive. In 1923, for the first time population exchange was compulsory, therefore "the civilianization of war meant that civilian ethnic cleansing became an integral part of the peace settlement"[21].

It is important to note that although the "population exchange" became identified with the Lausanne Treaty, this in fact is "concealing all the previous attempts at exchanging populations, such as the Ottoman-Bulgarian, the Ottoman-Greek and the Greek-Bulgarian exchanges that took place during the turbulent decade of the 1910s"[22]. Furthermore, the period 1918–1924 was defined by "the civilianization of collective violence"[23] due to the emergence of a new kind of "decentred warfare": "the national or imperial war fragmented into domestic and trans-national conflicts, dividing the populations that during 1914–1918 had fought for their nation or empire"[24].

Both the Centre for Asia Minor Studies (hereafter CAMS) and the Benaki Museum[25] have been significantly involved in issues concerning collective memory and national identity regarding Asia Minor Greek populations. The founding and activities of the CAMS[26] were

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[18] O. Yıldırım, "The Institutions of Uprooting: The Implementation of the Greek-Turkish Population Exchange Convention in Greece and Turkey", in: *Asia Minor Hellenism. Essays*, p. 125.

[19] J. Winter, *The Day the War Ended…*, p. 95. Exempted from the 'unmixing' were the Greeks staying in Constantinople (Istanbul), the inhabitants of the islands Imvros and Tenedos and the Muslims staying in Western Thrace. *Ibidem*, pp. 7, 95.

[20] *Ibidem*, p. 8.

[21] *Ibidem*, p. 7.

[22] Yıldırım, "The Institutions of Uprooting…", p. 119. For the influx of refugees to Greece before and during World War I, see: N. Andriotis, "Refugees in Greece Before and After 1922: The Numbers", in: *Asia Minor Hellenism. Essays*, pp. 101–103.

[23] See: R. Gerwarth, *The Vanquished: Why the First World War Failed to End*, 1917–1923, London, 2016.

[24] Winter, *The Day the War Ended…*, pp. 1–2. See also: A. Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires: Central Europe, Russia and the Middle East, 1914–1923*, London, 2001; R. Gerwarth and J. Horne, "Paramilitarism in Europe After the Great War: An Introduction", in: *War in Peace. Paramilitary Violence in Europe After the Great War*, eds R. Gerwarth and J. Horne, Oxford, 2012, pp. 1–18; R. Gingeras, *Sorrowful Shores: Violence, Ethnicity and the End of the Ottoman Empire, 1912–1923*, Oxford, 2009.

[25] The Benaki Museum was founded in 1930 by Antonis Benakis (1873–1954) who donated his collections to the Greek state. He was the son of the wealthy cotton merchant and politician Emmanouil Benakis (1843–1929), a fervent supporter of the Liberal Party of Eleftherios Venizelos, who as a benefactor had contributed to the settlement of refugees in Greece. Upon their relocation, the Benaki Museum received relics belonging to their communities and started creating collections. For the most part ecclesiastical silverware, embroideries, and jewellery, as well as manuscripts and printed books, "the refugees' treasures" in the Benaki Museum number some 1100 objects. See: A. Ballian, "The Refugee Relics: From Sacred Heirlooms to Historical Records", in: *Asia Minor Hellenism. Essays*, p. 146. You can find there also information about the refugees' heirlooms in the Benaki Museum (Ibidem, pp. 145–153).

[26] The CAMS was originally established in 1930 as the "Musical Folklore Archives" by the musicologist Melpo Logotheti-Merlier (1890–1979) and her husband, the Hellenist Octave Merlier (1897–1976), Director of

intertwined with the Asia Minor Catastrophe and the massive influx of refugees: "The entire premise behind the Centre for Asia Minor Studies (…) was that the recording of [refugees'] lives in their homelands, the preservation of their language as it was spoken, their songs, beliefs, history and experiences were matters of scholarly concern and larger national importance"[27].

Displaying more than 1,000 objects and over 500 photographs, the exhibition has been by far the most elaborate among a series of events commemorating the Asia Minor Catastrophe. Apart from the objects and archival material belonging to the co-organizers, the exhibition included items borrowed from more than forty other institutions and more than fifty private collections. The unprecedented, much publicized, number of donors and displayed items immensely increased the interest of the public. The exhibition was structured into three parts: "Heyday," "Catastrophe-Displacement," and "Rebirth." According to head curator, Vice-chair of the CAMS, Evita Arapoglou: "our aim was to bring together in a single account as many images, places, events, people and narratives as possible from the life of the Asia Minor Greeks and from the settlement and gradual incorporation of what was (…) the refugee world in Greece"[28].

The "Heyday" part of the exhibition celebrated the thriving activity of the Greek populations in different regions of Asia Minor[29]. It consisted of works of art, including valuable ecclesiastical objects as well as an array of artifacts, such as silver and porcelain table sets, handicrafts, such as embroideries, carpets and pottery; also, traditional costumes and European style dresses together with accessories, such as jewelry and shoes. These objects were showcased together with works of art, photographs, and archival materials, such as maps, various historical documents, and books [Figs 1–10].

The "Heyday" part was followed by a presentation of the events of 1908–1922 that led to the "Catastrophe": the first persecutions, the end of the First World War and the ensuing Treaties, the landing of the Greek forces in Asia Minor and the military campaign, the defeat and the burning of Smyrna, the flight to Greece and the population exchange. An oblong space painted in dark grey, displayed material mostly from the landing of the Greek army in Asia Minor and the 1919–1922 campaign [Figs 11, 12]. At the end of this ominous corridor-like space there was a black opening fitted with two curved screens, on which silent documentary films were projected, showing harrowing images of the 1922 Catastrophe [Fig. 13]. On the left, the cosmopolitan Smyrna (Izmir) on fire, while the anguished Christian civilians huddled together along the quay, trying to escape, or awaiting to be salvaged, as the warfront had reached the Aegean shoreline [Figs 14–16]; on the right, images of displacement and despair [Fig. 17]. There, silently bombarded with moving images, the visitors found themselves witnessing the unfolding tragedy of thousands of civilians. Using cinematography as a primary medium of transgenerational transmission of a collective trauma, this birth-canal shaped area was the most powerful space of the whole exhibition. Strategically located, this installation created a neuralgic field, where the spectators' kinesthetic experience aroused their emotions, before introducing them to the "Rebirth" part.

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the Institut Français d'Athènes. See: B. Psychoula-Kontogianni, "The Treasures of the Center for Asia Minor Studies", in: *Asia Minor Hellenism. Essays*, p. 301.

[27] M. Mazower, "Songs in the Age of Testimony: Melpo Merlier, the Sociological Imagination and the Catastrophe", in: *Asia Minor Hellenism. Essays*, p. 127. For an appraisal of the musicological work of Melpo Merlier within the context of the international intellectual trends of the era, see pages 127–135 and 328–329.

[28] E. Arapoglou, "Introduction", in: *Asia Minor Hellenism*, Exhibition Catalogue, p. 14.

[29] *Ibidem*, pp. 14–15.

This final part of the exhibition focused on the settlement and integration of the refugees in Greece. In direct opposition to the splendor of the "Heyday" part, with its spacious mustard yellow rooms full of valuable objects, in the "Rebirth" part visitors had to explore a neatly arranged compartmentalized smaller space in which the refugees' degraded status was intensely felt through the use of stands resembling tents [Figs 18–20]. Along with a selection of testimonies, this part showcased salvaged heirlooms, numerous photographs, and other documents regarding refugee camps and various settlements, the planning of organized housing, state welfare provisions, and the work of the Refugee Settlement Commission. Also, material and archival evidence of the trades plied by the refugees in the cities, including carpet weaving, textile and embroidery workshops, and ceramic production [Fig. 21].

In this area a great number of household objects and items of clothing looked very familiar to visitors, whose households possessed or still possess similar heirlooms, either salvaged from the places of the refugees' origin or produced by refugees in Greece. Throughout the exhibition objects which had survived the people who used them or produced them kept the spectators connected to the irreparable collective loss. Following Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, "the study of such personal and familial material remnants calls for an expanded understanding of testimony"[30], since "testimonial objects"

> carry memory traces of the past (…) but they also embody the very process of its transmission. They testify to the historical contexts and the daily qualities of the past moments in which they were produced, also, to the ways in which material objects carry memory traces from one generation to the next.[31]

Head-curator Arapoglou, herself a third-generation descendant of Asia Minor refugees, refers to "the *chronicle* of Asia Minor Hellenism"[32], highlighting the "special value" of the personal possessions loaned by private collectors[33]. Furthermore, she describes the exhibition contents as an archive of objects, documentation, and testimonies significant in the process of intergenerational memory transmission:

> It was the second generation (…) which felt the need (…), through living with parents and grandparents, to seek out their ancestral homeland and their history. Perhaps this exhibition will provide an occasion for the forging of links with places and times, to project documentation which will *inform and perhaps move all those who have something which binds them to Asia Minor. Perhaps, again, those who are much younger will recognize, through the presentation of so many aspects of the Asia Minor chronicle, how many things they have heard or read, customs, stories, names of neighbourhoods, sports teams, that all echo the history of Asia Minor Hellenism.*[34]

Regarding the processes of recognition and the "forging of links with places and times," photographic images play a predominant role. A plethora of personal photographs, including photo murals in the "Heyday" part [Figs 5–7] and a large hanging panel composed of photographs of Greek soldiers in the "Catastrophe" part [Fig.12], kept reminding to the spectators the refugees' lost world and their misery in their "new homeland":

[30] Hirsch and Spitzer, *Testimonial Objects…*, pp. 334–335.
[31] See: M. Hirsch and L. Spitzer, "Testimonial Objects", in: Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust…*, p. 178.
[32] Arapoglou, "Introduction"…, p. 18 (my emphasis).
[33] *Ibidem*, p. 16.
[34] *Ibidem*, p. 17 (my emphasis).

> More than oral or written narratives, photographic images that survive massive devastation and outlive their subjects and owners, function as ghostly revenants from an irretrievably lost past world. They enable us, in the present, not only to see and touch that past, but also to try and animate it by undoing the finality of the photographic 'take'.[35]

Photography relates to loss and death, by bringing back "the past in the form of a gostly revenant", while emphasizing "its immutable and irreversible pastness (…)"[36]. Prioritizing the importance of family photographs as a medium of postmemory, Hirsch explained that the photographic image "clarifies the connection between familial and affiliative postmemory and the mechanisms by which public archives and institutions have been able both to reembody and to reindividualize 'cultural/archival' memory"[37].

The CAMS' Chairman George David describes the scope of the exhibition underlining also the transgenerational remembrance of the 1922 Catastrophe, blending elements of collective history, national identity and cultural heritage:

> The centenary of the Asia Minor Catastrophe of 1922 deserves more than a somber tribute to one of the most traumatic moments of our collective history. It presents us with the opportunity to consider the power of memory in the aftermath of uprooting and disaster, and to honor the ordinary people who took it upon themselves to become guardians of lost homelands by painstakingly preserving salvaged documents and objects, remnants of material culture and musical and cultural traditions. All that constituted the only lingering ties binding the survivors to a world that was no more.[38]

Though the importance of the refugees' testimonies gathered by the CAMS' founders and their associates is stressed both in the catalogue and the accompanying volume to the exhibition, the visitors saw only a staged setting of the Merlier's work-space and belongings; next to it there was a panel with some written refugee's testimonies from the 1950s, together with the informants' photographs. Why was only such a small part dedicated to the creation of the CAMS and its collection of refugee testimonies? Why was there no mention of the languages and dialects they spoke in their places of origin? This omission is surprising in the light of Bruce Clark's observation that for the refugees "the most acute dysphoria was linguistic"; indeed, "the Orthodox Christians deported to Greece included at least 100,000 whose sole or main language was Turkish"; similarly, tens of thousands of Muslims deported from Greece to Turkey spoke Greek as their sole or main language[39]. Moreover, Greek dialects spoken by many refugees were incomprehensible to mainland Greeks.

A homogenous nation-state with a single language was a common objective for the two countries. As Clark puts it, both for the Greek and for the Turkish state "inculcating linguistic uniformity – along with uniformity of political and ethnic consciousness – was a high priority" and "the Lausanne refugees, whether they spoke standard Greek, a Greek dialect or Turkish, were seen as a long-term assets in the drive to consolidate Greece's territorial and social

[35] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust…*, p. 36; Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory…*, p. 115.
[36] M. Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*, Cambridge, MA and London, 1997, p. 20.
[37] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory…*, p. 115.
[38] G.A. David, [Untitled Introduction], in: *Asia Minor Hellenism*, Exhibition Catalogue, p. 11.
[39] B. Clark, "Language and Lausanne: A Reflection on Dysphoria and Symmetry", in: *Asia Minor Hellenism. Essays*, p. 164.

integrity"[40]. Touching upon the connection between the refugees' geographical origins, spoken language and the degree of integration in their new "homeland", Eric Sjöberg observes:

> The various degrees of integration into Greek society had often corresponded to the geographic location of origin and the extent of linguistic affinity to the form of Modern Greek spoken in Greece. Being Eastern Anatolians, who spoke either Turkish or the peculiar Pontiac dialect of Greek, the Christians from Pontos had belonged to the category most exposed to social marginalization in the new country.[41]

The "epilogue" of the exhibition consisted in a 22-minute video installation titled "My Asia Minor," demonstrating the transmission of the "Catastrophe" trauma across generations [Fig. 22]. Fourteen young people narrate *their* Asia Minor, inscribing the traumatic experiences of their forebears (including great-grandparents) into their own life stories. The telling title refers to their belated 'lived' experience through their relatives' memories and cultural practices. These video testimonies, clearly orchestrated, lack spontaneity. Though aesthetically awkward, the whole setting of the installation resonates with Hirsch's concept of postmemory as a mediated experience, conveyed by stories, objects and cultural behaviors, transmitting "traumatic fragments of events" which "happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present"[42]. Here, the intergenerational transmission of the fragmented traumatic inheritance is enacted through stories (including a scar by a Turkish sword on a grandmother's cheek, but also the sorrow of deportation shared with their Turkish neighbors), Greek and Turkish songs, and objects, such as a religious icon, a carpet, an embroidered face towel, a pair of wooden carved spoons used for the Keklik dance or the key of an abandoned house in Cappadocia.

These narrations relate to "*familial* structures of mediation and representation" and at the same time "facilitate the *affiliative* acts of the postgeneration"[43]. Hirsch describes "affiliative postmemory" as "the result of contemporaneity and generational connection with the literal second generation combined with structures of mediation that would be broadly appropriable, available and indeed compelling enough to encompass a larger collective in an organic web of transmission"[44].

The fact that postmemory can be adopted as a position ("*retrospective witnessing by adoption*"[45]) points to an ethical stance towards dark events and suffering. From this perspective, Hirsch's conception of postmemory employing creative imagination to gain proximity to others' traumatic experiences involves both an acute historical awareness and an evolving capacity for empathy. Therefore, postmemory as a position by choice addresses

> a question of conceiving oneself as multiply interconnected with others of the same, of previous, and of subsequent generations, of the same and of other-proximate or distant-cultures and subcultures. It is a question (…) of an *ethical* relation to the oppressed and persecuted other for which postmemory can serve

[40] *Ibidem*, p. 165.
[41] E. Sjöberg, *The Making of the Greek Genocide. Contested Memories of the Ottoman Greek Catastrophe*, New York, 2017, p. 63.
[42] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust…*, p. 5.
[43] *Ibidem*, p. 39.
[44] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory…*, pp. 114–115.
[45] M. Hirsch, "Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory", in: *Visual Culture and the Holocaust*, ed. B. Zelizer, London, 2001, p. 221 (emphasis in the original).

> as a model: as I can 'remember' my parents' memories, I can also 'remember' the suffering of others (…).[46]

Although such an approach is vulnerable to political criticism[47], still it could have been meaningful for the present situation in Greece, which currently hosts a large number of refugees, an issue that the exhibition bypasses. In the catalogue, the head curator's reference to "situations which after so many decades are troubling the world of today" is so vague that it almost goes unnoticed[48]. On behalf of the CAMS, George David presents his view on the connection of the exhibition to the present explicitly; by stressing the role of memory through the exhibition's contents, he closely relates its significance to the necessity of preserving the Greek nations' identity in an era of globalization:

> Therein perhaps lies the deeper importance of an exhibition such as this, which acknowledges the persistence of memory by going back to records, testimonials, personal and religious objects, words and images; (…) *pointing to the power of memory in shaping our collective self-perception, as we look to the future, as that invaluable link which enables a nation to maintain its sense of self, in an increasingly global world*.[49]

David's words show how exhibition strategies are developed to address collective traumatic events of national significance, and how they are employed to mobilize acts of remembrance. They also bring to the fore Hirsch's position that postmemory "need not be restricted to the family, or even to a group that shares an ethnic or national identity marking," but "through particular forms of identification, adoption, and projection" "can be more broadly available"[50]. Still, postmemory articulations within the context of commemorative exhibitions designed to promote idealized narratives of patrimonies raise concerns about the conditioned environment and the objectives of the stakeholders involved, especially when they address less proximate members of the generation that went through suffering but "share a legacy of trauma and thus the curiosity, the urgency and the frustrated *need* to know about a traumatic past"[51].

The Benaki/CAMS exhibition's overall design, juxtaposing photographs, documents, editions, and ephemera, works of art and a vast array of artifacts combined with selected testimonies, resulted in an artificial panorama that imposed the notion of a unified national identity. This was particularly obvious as the exhibition's contents did not touch upon the fact that the thousands of refugees who settled on the outskirts of Athens, Piraeus and other major cities, often provoked the hostility of the indigenous Greeks by offering considerably cheaper labour. Refugees were also treated as a threat to public health, accused of spreading epidemics[52], while tens of thousands, mainly children and the elderly, lost their lives in ill-equip-

[46] *Ibidem* (emphasis in the original).
[47] See, for instance: J.J. Long, "Monika Maron's *Pawels Briefe*: Photography, Narrative and the Claim of Memory", in: *German Memory Contests. The Quest for Identity in Literature, Film, and Discourse Since 1990*, eds. A. Fuchs, M. Cosgrove, and G. Grote, Rochester, NY, 2006, p. 161.
[48] See: Arapoglou, "Introduction"…, p. 17.
[49] David, [Untitled Introduction]…, p. 11 (my emphasis).
[50] Hirsch, "Surviving Images…", p. 220.
[51] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*…, p. 35 (emphasis in the original).
[52] See, for instance: G. Eglezou, *Refugees in Greece (1922). The Attitude of the Press Towards their Arrival*, "Ethnologia Balkanica", 13 (2009), pp. 75–90.

ped "disinfecting stations" and disease-ridden encampments[53]. It is worth noting here that originally the CAMS' "chief concern was the revival of memories" of the refugees' life in their homelands, "whereas less emphasis was put on [their] settlement in Greece"[54], which eventually proved prolonged and extremely problematic[55]. In addition, the exhibition concentrated mainly on the culture of Asia Minor urban populations, stressing their wealth and prosperity[56], barely touching on the life of rural communities. Moreover, the frictions and hostility exhibited by indigenous farmers, especially in Macedonia and Thrace, against refugees, who were given plots of land recently appropriated by the state[57], were not visible to the spectators.

Regarding the locals' hostility toward the refugees and the latter's sense of identity, Renée Hirschon's 1989 anthropological study, *Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe. The Social Life of Asia Minor Refugees in Piraeus*[58] remains illuminating in many ways. Fifty years after their resettlement, Hirschon conducted fieldwork in the refugee community of Kokkinia in Pireus. Exploring the processes of their assimilation and their cultural practices, Hirschon provided ample evidence that they were still conscious of their distinct identity defined by their memories of Asia Minor; also, by studying the shaping of their mindsets through self-representations, she brought to the fore social demarcations relating to regional origins within the boundaries of their community. As Erik Sjöberg notes, "the Greeks of the former Ottoman lands had not been a homogenous group, and even in exile their descendants continued to cultivate their attachment to the regions, towns and villages of their ancestors"[59].

Given the fact that well after the Second Word War the refugees continued to form "a separate social body within the wider Greek nation, insisting on its special identity and its differences from the host society"[60], the Benaki/CAMS exhibition celebrated the remembrance of the 1922 defeat and the Great Fire of Smyrna as historical events of an ethnically homogeneous Greece. Nevertheless, the remembrance of the 1922 Asia Minor Catastrophe has not always been of significant national importance. The debacle of the Greek army that had invaded Turkey after the Armistice of 1918 and the events of 1922 had been associated with a "defeatist temperament," whereas the experience of the Second World War followed by the Greek Civil War, called for a heroic self-image for the national collectivity; in the 1950s, evocations of 1922 victimhood would only remind (and signify) national weakness[61].

Major national commemorations of past catastrophes are processed within specific political and social contexts, often in line with hegemonic representations of the social environment they address. Considering the importance that Asia Minor memories still carry in contemporary Greek culture[62], the Benaki/CAMS exhibition enhanced the visitors' enga-

[53] See: E. Kontogiorgi, "The Settlement of the Refugees", in: *Asia Minor Hellenism. Essays*, p. 171.
[54] See: B. Psychoula-Kontogianni, "The Treasures of the Center for Asia Minor Studies", in: *Asia Minor Hellenism. Essays*, p. 303.
[55] See: Kontogiorgi, "The Settlement of the Refugees"…, pp. 171–181, 335–338.
[56] See: Arapoglou, "Introduction"…, pp. 14–15.
[57] Kontogiorgi, "The Settlement...", p. 175. Extensively, see: E. Kontogiorgi, *Population Exchange in Greek Macedonia: The Rural Settlement of Refugees, 1922–1930*, Oxford, 2006.
[58] See: R. Hirschon, *Heirs of the Greek Catastrophe: The Social Life of Asia Minor Refugees in Pireaus*, Oxford, 1989, reissued: New York and Oxford, 1998, 2023.
[59] Sjöberg, *The Making of the Greek Genocide*…, p. 63.
[60] M. Llewellyn-Smith, "Preface to Second Impression", in: D. Pentzopoulos, *The Balkan Exchange of Minorities and Its Impact on Greece* (1962), London, 2002, p. 12.
[61] See: Sjöberg, *The Making of the Greek Genocide*…, p. 60.
[62] See: K. Gedgaudaitė, *Memories of Asia Minor in Contemporary Greek Culture. An Itenary*, London, 2021.

gement, mobilizing various modes of transgenerational transmission of the 1922 trauma. Primarily aiming at elevating the transgenerational sense of nationhood, the exhibition failed to offer a better understanding of the multicultural diversity of the Asia Minor refugees as well as the adversities of their assimilation. Also, by focusing on the Greek-Orthodox collectivity, the recognition of the trauma suffered by those displaced to the opposite side of the Aegean was ignored.

Most importantly, modes of transmission of past collective traumatic events inform current catastrophes: the exhibition missed the chance to foster empathy for the tragic aspects of the current "refugee crisis" which has been heavily affecting Greece for years[63]. Hirsch's conceptualization of postmemory towards a broader historical consciousness and the politics of remembrance gains relevance here: "At stake is not only a personal/familial/generational sense of ownership and protectiveness, but an evolving ethical and theoretical discussion about the workings of trauma, memory, and intergenerational acts of transfer. It is a discussion increasingly taking place in similar terms, regarding other massive historical catastrophes"[64]. In this context, the ability of commemorative events to manipulate collective consciousness, especially through the mobilization of a sense of empathy, should not be underestimated: "Empathy is something that needs to be learned, and as such it can be stimulated or blocked, proving itself susceptible to the individual or collective manipulation"[65].

Figures:

Figure 1

[63] See, for instance: A. Papadopoulou, "'Give Us Asylum and Help Us Leave the Country!' Kurdish Asylum Seekers in Greece and the Politics of Reception", in: *Middle East and North African Immigrants in Europe*, eds. A. Al-Shahi and R. Lawless, 2005, pp. 247–262; A. Triantafyllidou, "Migration in Greek", in: *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Greek Politics*, eds. K. Featherstone and D. Sotiropoulos, Oxford, 2020, pp. 550–566; V. Vlassis, "Liminality, Asylum, and Arbitrariness in the Greek State's Implementation of the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement", in: *The Migration Mobile: Border Dissidence, Sociotechnical Resistance, and the Construction of Irregularized Migrants*, eds V. Galis, M. B. Jørgensen, and M. Sandberg, Lanham, 2022, pp. 83–103.

[64] Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust…*, pp. 1–2.

[65] M.R. Lizarazu, *Renegotiating Postmemory. The Holocaust in Contemporary German-Language Jewish Literature*, Rochester, NY, 2020, p. 142.

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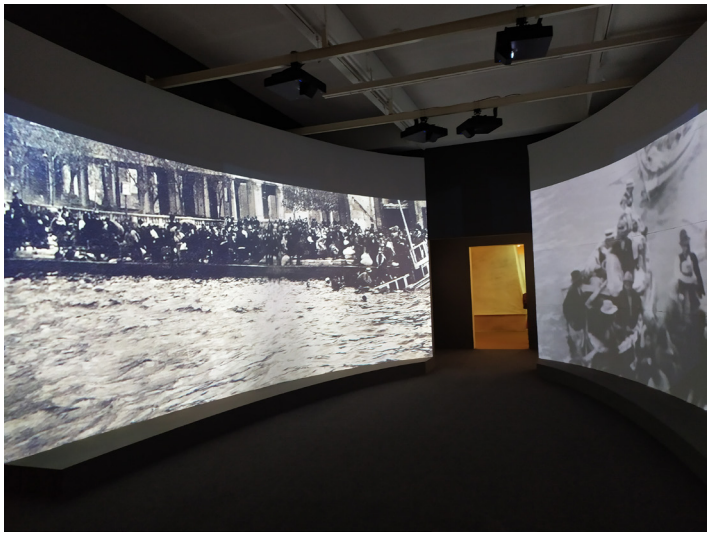

Figure 14

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Summary:

In the paper, I critically discuss the commemorative exhibition "Asia Minor Hellenism: Heyday-Catastrophe-Displacement-Rebirth" (Athens, Benaki Museum, 2022–2023), examining the role of postmemory in the shaping of national identity in contemporary Greece. Building my analysis on Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, I draw attention to commemorative exhibition practices and the intergenerational transmission of collective traumatic experiences related to dark events of national significance. Touching upon issues concerning the civilianization of war, I interrogate commemorative exhibitions as prefabricated events, bringing to the fore the selective management of collective memory through exhibition design.

Keywords:

1922 Catastrophe, civilianization of war, postmemory, commemorative exhibitions, national identity