

Chapter 13

Identity Politics: A Study of Diasporic Identity Mediated Through Family Photography

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ABSTRACT

Drawing from a well-established interdisciplinary history that focuses on the affective power of photography when animated through oral narration, this chapter looks at how diasporic identity is mediated through family photographs. One case study that uses photo-elicitation as research method is referenced in order to consider the mnemonic value of photographs or what can be described as the ‘affect’ of the image in evoking critical memories. In doing this, a sense of diasporic belonging to a new homeland, grief, trauma, and loss is investigated. This chapter concludes by highlighting that critical traumatic memories can be inter-generationally transferred into post-memories as the past is brought into the present through discussion and reflection.

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I seek to find new possibilities of examining diasporic identity and in doing so highlight an otherwise hidden history. Specifically, the focus of the chapter looks at how diasporic identity is mediated through family photography. Drawing from one case study that uses photo-elicitation as research method, I consider the mnemonic value of photographs, or what can be described as the ‘affect’ of the image in evoking critical memories. Furthermore, I contemplate how a sense of belonging, grief and loss are navigated amidst this process. To shape this theory, I recount the interview with Jan and her family, who discuss the importance of Jan’s family photographs in locating their diasporic Anglo-Turkish identity.¹ To give a critical context to the research, relevant interdisciplinary socio-cultural literature is drawn on. In doing this I aim to deepen the argument and strengthen the claim that photo-elicitation of family photography is a relevant and effective method through which diasporic identity can be navigated.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-5337-7.ch013

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It is important that I position myself in relation to the research in order to situate my research findings. I am an artist, academic and writer, trained in both anthropology and photography. The research for this chapter is located in north London. Although I am a long-term local resident of north London, I am an outsider to the Anglo-Turkish community. This means in relation to the research; I concurrently oscillate between an insider to the geographical locale and outsider to the local Anglo-Turkish community. My interest is driven by a desire to better understand the community and with-it the different cultural practices around me. As I will go on and discuss, there are specific advantages and challenges when positing oneself as an insider and as an outsider within the research process, which are not easy to navigate. As an insider to the local area, I can spend time in the area and in doing so pay attention to the different practices in the neighbourhood. As an outsider to the community I am conscious that I may misunderstand or even misinterpret local practices. Motivated by these concerns, I am cautious in my approach to the research process and use photography as familiar tool to pivot the research process. During the research process I listen carefully to Jan and her family as they narrate their family photographs with words and gestures. As I will discuss, through this process the photographs are given meaning - they are animated and become audible. This chapter is drawn to conclusion by focusing on one family portrait that sits on the mantelpiece the main living area of Jan's home. Through the biographical narrative that accompanies this portrait, a traumatic family narrative is revealed. This personal narrative becomes collectively owned by Jan's family and then turns into a cultural narrative of migration, within a socio-global context.

Background: Critical Context

Accessing the stories that narrate these photographs is crucial to unlocking their significance. One can ponder over what makes other people's family photographs so fascinating. They are the most ubiquitous sort of photography, which even when the subjects are unknown to us are intriguing to engage with. I am curious about how seemingly generic family photographs, once animated, enable Jan and her family to reflect on their experience of migration and belonging to a diasporic Anglo-Turkish community in London. To elicit crucial narratives from Jan's photographs a mnemonic framework is needed. This framework draws from a robust interdisciplinary tradition of doing memory work with photographs. For example, the primary text of photo-historian Martha Langford (2001) is helpful in understanding how to work with family photographs. Langford advises that it is the narration of photographs, what she calls the 'oral performance', that gives meaning to them and thus gives them value. Within this context, the photographs have potential to become what Geoffrey Batchen (2004) describes as an 'aide-de-mémoire'. Annette Kuhn (2007) builds on this framework, by suggesting that photographs as objects of discussion are in fact 'memory texts'. That is to say, she describes 'memory texts' as acts of memory which are performed with family photographs and albums. She writes:

Personal and family photographs figure importantly in cultural memory, and memory work with photographs offers a particularly productive route to understanding the social and cultural uses and instrumentalities of memory. (Kuhn 2007 p. 283)

She goes on to write that memory work is not necessarily evidence of a 'truth' but can be seen as material to be mined for possibilities, adding that memory texts typically elicit a vignette of memories, anecdotes, fragments and feelings which are often not anchored to specific times. Furthermore, it is helpful to consider more recent writing on photography and memory such as Margaret Olin (2012) and Tina

Campt's (2017) whose writing highlight the importance of gesture in working with family photographs. Olin suggests that the interplay between touch and vision is crucial in accessing the secrets of family photographs and goes on to state that the photograph acts as a witness to the emotions embedded within it. Campt articulates this further by suggesting that images can also be listened to, should we choose to do so. The process of recalling the narratives around photographs and listening to the photographs draws on our ability to recollect the past, which is a process of social remembering. I should highlight that there is also an overlap in disciplinary methodologies that draw from photography as an *aide-de-mémoire* through art historical/photographic methods and that of visual anthropology. For example, anthropologist Sarah Pink when writing about the value of photography as form of 'knowing' also points out that:

Photographs are inextricably interwoven with our personal identities, narratives, lifestyles, cultures and societies, as well as with definitions of history, space and truth. (Pink 200. p. 17)

Although the cited writers' cross disciplinary boundaries, and notably there are subtle nuances in their theories, they all suggest photography is more than a visual practice, indeed the oral, the tactile, as well as the visual are integral to the reading of a photograph. To adopt a performative photographic method of photo-elicitation and enable these photographs to speak I ask Jan to choose a selection of her family photographs to discuss. I am uncertain exactly what to expect, similar situations have produced a mixture of self-organised photographic family albums, small quantities of loose 6x4 inch glossy colour photographs kept in plastic process sleeves, and in one case eleven years' worth of precious photographic memories compressed inside a tea cosy.

PROCESS OF RESEARCH

The meeting and subsequent interview I recall with Jan illustrates the complexity of undertaking cross-cultural interviews. I am introduced to her through her eldest daughter, a young adult involved in the photographic industry in north London. To better understand how Jan positions her identity and fosters a sense of belonging to her new homeland, it is important to highlight that Jan arrived in England as an asylum seeker from Turkey fourteen years prior to my meeting her, and me making a close reading of a selection of her photographs. Although Jan and I live in the same area of London we are not part of the same community. Jan is a Muslim asylum seeker from Turkey, and I am from an Irish Catholic background and moved to the area for work. In view of this situation, I acknowledge that some of the practices and routines of Jan and her family maybe unfamiliar and I am anxious about how to engage with Jan respectfully and sensitively. I am conscious of my performance as a guest in Jan's home. What I mean by this is I am uncertain how to behave in the home of someone from a different cultural and religious background. I am conscious I could be perceived as impolite. For example, should I take off my shoes when I cross the threshold into the home? And having been invited into this private home, I am uncertain which rooms I am permitted to enter? During this process I am thinking of sociologist Erving Goffman's (1959) primary and much cited writing on the presentation of the self in everyday life. He writes that 'performance' is not simply for special occasions, but in fact *all* interaction between actors (people) are performed. Thus he argues that the 'self', is presented in everyday life through specific gestures, expressions, practices and props. Within this context I am acutely aware that the presentation of the 'self' is cultural and that my performance as a stranger in this home may not meet the expectations

of the host family. This initially leads me to be timid in asking questions, worried about how intrusive they appear. On reflection, I wonder what Jan made of this nervous stranger on the threshold of her home, awaiting an invitation to enter it?

I arrive at Jan's home at the agreed time, carrying my camera, a note pad, a recording device, and tripod. I have chocolates for Jan and the offer of a family portrait in exchange for the interview.²

Through contemplating questions such as how the home is organised, occupied and used, I start to familiarise myself with Jan's place of home and think through how to interact with Jan and her family within this space. The home is rented, which according to Jan's daughter means permission to hang any visual mementos, inclusive of photographs, are prohibited by the lease agreement. As a consequence of this the home is decoratively sparse. There are no photographs on the walls and only one photograph that sits on the fireplace. I am searching for what anthropologist Daniel Miller (2008) in *The Comfort of Things*, refers to as objects that talk. He highlights that the objects with which we choose to surround ourselves reveal what he calls an 'authentic truth' (2008:2) about us, if they are listened to. Although I am unconvinced that Miller's use of the term 'authentic truth' accurately frames the idea of objects that talk, I am in agreement with Langford (2001) and Kuhn (1995) that objects *can* talk – if animated with an oral narrative. However, my opinion is that the subjectivity of the oral narrative is what gives individual meaning to the objects, for the narrator, rather than there being an 'authentic truth' embedded in the object. I am interested in Jan's photographs as image-objects that talk. This aligns with Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (2004) and Elizabeth Edwards and Chris Morton (2015) writing about photographs as image-objects. They suggest that photographs are increasingly understood as mnemonic knowledge objects, which are imbued with personal and cultural meaning, and they argue that the aim of narrating these images-objects in the home is to elicit narratives that otherwise might not be immediately present.

I had imagined the interview would be between myself and Jan, discussing her relationship with her family photographs. However, I underestimated the communication challenges we would face. Whilst, I found that conducting previous interviews with Anglo-Turkish photographers in the high-street photography studios in our local area was mostly straightforward. The photographers are familiar with speaking English to customers inside and outside the Anglo-Turkish community. This is not always the case when conducting an interview in a family home. Although Jan has lived in Britain for fourteen years her interactions outside the family home and within the wider community has been limited. She stays at home with her children, only socialising outside the home in the local Kurdish-Turkish community, in north London. A consequence of this is that her command of English is limited, and I do not speak Turkish. A point of connection between us came when she learns my mother is Welsh. She was located in Wales when she first arrived in Britain as an asylum seeker and remembers the compassion of her Welsh hosts. She likes the Welsh very much; she thinks they are friendly. I share memories of childhood summers spent with my grandparents in Wales. At this point she smiles broadly and is open to engage with my questions.

On arriving at Jan's home in north London, it quickly became apparent that the conversation is going to be a family affair, by this I mean that we have a collective conversation advocated through Jan's eldest daughter, and the other family members present at the interview, that include Jan's youngest daughter (who is eleven) and her adult nephew, who is in his twenties. Our dialogue is complicated, it is bilingual, mediated through Jan's eldest daughter, who translates questions and answers between us. The pattern of the interview is, I ask a question in English and Jan looks at her daughter for a Turkish translation, nodding to confirm she understands the question. It takes a short while to receive a response to my questions. The replies are discussed and contested between the family members in Turkish, before

a collective response is agreed and then shared with me in English. There are gaps, pauses, quizzical looks and disagreements between the family members before an agreed narrative is relayed back to me in English. Something interesting arises through this process. Although there is a lack of clarity between Jan's voice and that of her eldest daughter, what is clear is the emergence of a collective narrative. Collective pronouns are used when discussing the selected photographs, they are referred to as 'ours', and 'we' is used when talking of the family's position in relation to the foretold narrative. This indicates a shared authorship to the oral histories that animate the photographs.

In order to focus the conversation, after initial questions around the indexical organisation of the photographs, without further guidance I requested that three photographs are selected to discuss in more depth. Figures 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 are chosen by Jan. They are two amateur vernacular family photographs and one professional studio photograph. The photographs discussed include a photograph of Jan's daughter shortly after her birth; a portrait of Jan, her husband and the Lord Mayor of Haringay and a formal studio portrait of Jan's son taken to commemorate his circumcision ceremony. The oral histories that accompany these photographs, brought together with contextual information give insight into Jan's relationship to the photographs and explains how a sense of diasporic identity and feeling of belonging is mediated through them. In an attempt to give clarity to the meaning of these photographs for Jan and her family, I also pay attention to the interactions beyond of the frame of the photograph, such as how and where they are stored/displayed in Jan's home, who took the photographs and whose voice I am listening to during the interview.

As I will discuss, it is clear that the selected photographs, for Jan, are emotionally charged. Her relationship with them goes beyond the surface and is secondary to the emotions imbued in them. The subsequent writing gives a flavour of the biographical narratives and social interactions that accompany Jan's photographs. It offers insight into the emotional attachment Jan has to these photographs and in doing this unlocks their meaning.³ In figure 1.1 (2000) a small baby is wrapped in a white blanket, a child's dummy lays on top of this baby. Gazing at this photograph, Jan is momentarily lost for words. She is emotionally overcome and falters with her words. She holds her hand on her chest to calm her breathing; struggling to relay the narrative of this photograph. The baby in the photograph is Jan's youngest daughter, who is now eleven years old. The photograph was taken shortly after Jan gave birth to her. Although it is unclear in the photograph, I am told that in this photograph the newly born baby lies in a hospital incubator. Jan (via her eldest daughter) goes on to explain that she had a difficult delivery and nearly died in childbirth. My assumption is that in recalling this memory it evokes anxiety and pain connected to the trauma of birth and ask if this is the case. I am corrected in this assumption by Jan's eldest daughter who confirms her mother is happy, really happy to see this photograph. For Jan, the photograph indicates a great achievement. It signifies safety and security for her child – that is a healthy child born in Britain who has the right to apply to be a British citizen.

There are three people in figure 2 (circa 2006) these are Jan, the Mayor of Haringay, and Jan's now estranged husband. The photograph is taken indoors in the formal setting, of Haringay town hall. In the background of the photograph hangs a 'Union Jack' flag. The Mayor wears his full formal civic regalia, inclusive of red cloak and a ceremonial gold livery chain around his neck. Between Jan and her husband, they hold a piece of A4 white paper towards the camera. Due to poor quality of the photograph, it is unclear what is on the paper and why this paper is important. However, the location and the gesture of presentation of the paper suggests this photograph evidences something significant. In fact, the paper marks an important milestone for Jan. The photograph was made to commemorate the day Jan became a British citizen. She smiles at this photograph. For Jan, this photograph is an emotive object that symbolises

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her belonging to a new homeland. It is a powerful photograph that visually authenticates Jan becoming a British citizen, and with it the guarantees of civil liberties and freedoms of being a British citizen.

Figure 1. Jan's daughter straight after her birth, personal family album 2000 (© 2022, the author).



Figure 2. Jan, the Mayor of Haringey, Jan's husband, personal family album circa 2006 (© 2022, the author).



Figure 3. Jan's son's circumcision portrait, personal family album 2007 (© 2022, the author)



A cursory glance at figure 3 (2007) without the cultural context leaves me perplexed. As I will explain, it is a complex photograph that draws on a number of different cultural references. It is a professional studio portrait of a young boy of maybe eight or nine years old, made by *Platin Studios* in a north London. It is commonplace to see this style of portrait in the shop front window of the north London photography studios. The portraits mark the passing of the circumcision ritual of young Muslim boys in the Turkish/Anglo-Turkish community. In the circumcision portrait the boy wears a traditional white Ottoman-Turkish circumcision outfit.⁴ Knowledge about the history of the circumcision ritual and ceremonial outfits, is provided by cultural historian Kaya Sahin (2018) who writes about the cultural history of the Ottoman-Turkish circumcision ceremony. He writes that today's ceremonial ritual practice is linked to the twenty-day Ottoman-Turkish circumcision celebrations of 1530 which saw the reimagining of cultural Ottoman-Turkish traditions, such as the male circumcision ritual in an attempt to elevate ritual practices in Muslim societies. This twenty-day event saw three Ottoman princes entering into the Hippodrome in Constantinople on horseback to be greeted by the Ottoman elite and

commoners alike. Sahin adds that the commemorative circumcision portraits are immediately identifiable by the traditional ceremonial Ottoman-Turkish costume, worn by the young boy in their portrait. These outfits are worn symbolically as a cultural statement that links to the historical Ottoman-Turkish tradition wherein the Ottoman princes wore expensive distinctive outfits adorned with jewellery to their circumcision celebrations. Today's outfits are variations on a white satin three-piece suit with a fur trimmed cape embellished with silver trim, a beaded cap, and sometimes a white sceptre in hand. The function of the outfit is ceremonial, it acts as a visual signifier to indicate and celebrate that the boy wearing it has transitioned through the circumcision ritual. The outfit visually links the circumcision ritual to the boys familial Ottoman-Turkish Muslim heritage. It can be speculated that the young boy in his circumcision outfit is for a day at least, a little bejewelled prince, who is symbolically welcomed into the community as a young Muslim man. In wearing this outfit it becomes a symbolic visual marker of the ritual. The circumcision portrait visually confirms and commemorate this ritual. What is notable about this portrait is the imaginative yet incongruous use of digital technologies in combining the background, the foreground, and the boy in his circumcision outfit. In this portrait the young boy sits on a child's rocking horse. Visual parallels can be drawn between the boy on the rocking horse and the above-mentioned historical circumcision ceremony that saw the princes ride into Constantinople on a horse. By placing the young boy on the rocking horse this important ritual practice is again connoted. In addition, digital post-production techniques have been used to create an animated world that surrounds the boy's ceremonial portrait. A bright green background and animated caricatures have been digitally added. The visual motifs draw from the countryside, this includes a green field, trees, butterflies, rabbits, a squirrel, a tortoise, a woodpecker, a treehouse and a white picket fence. As an outsider to the customs and visual tastes of the Anglo-Turkish community I cannot understand the logic of the visual motifs that are embedded into this portrait. I can see what they are but the connotations of these motifs are unclear. Questions directed to Jan about the choice of background and surrounding portrait *mise-en-scène* fail to reveal any further information about the photograph, which was made some time ago. The construction of the photograph seems to have been determined by the photography studio. Follow up questions with that studio reveals little additional information about this photograph. However, I am advised that the *mise-en-scène* background of Western style motifs used in this portrait is a generic background the likes of which are used with *all* of the children's portraits made in this Anglo-Turkish studio. The visual characters used with the portrait, according to the studio, are a testament to the fact that children like to see the colour, pattern and animals with their portraits.

I put forward the idea that this photograph demonstrates an active exchange of ideas and practices across cultures. I speculate about how the additional digital propping to this child's portrait informs its reading and I note that the visual propping in the photograph draws inspiration from a Western vocabulary of representation seen in children's animation, such as the white picket fence and animated animals. I am immediately reminded of the visual language used in the original Disney version of *Mary Poppins* (1964) film which has since been reimagined in *Mary Poppins Returns* (2018). Specifically, I recall the chalk drawing scene in which Mary, Bert and the children jump into the drawing and enter an enchanted, make-believe world. In this imagined world the adults and children interact with an animated *mise-en-scène*. They are carefree, safe and protected in this imaginary world. Although this hypothesis does not specifically answer my questions about the *mise-en-scène* portrait propping, I can see the influence of Western aesthetics and wonder whether the popularity of these make-believe worlds in the children's portraits metaphorically offer a pseudo-sanctuary for the children that inhabit them?

The discussed photograph (figure 3), is precious for Jan, because it visually commemorates an important rite of passage for her only son. It has been carefully presented in a traditional family photographic album alongside eleven other photographic portraits of Jan's son of similar style and construction. When discussing this photograph, the cellophane film that holds it in place in the album is peeled back so it can be seen more clearly. Jan gazes at the photograph, her hand brushes over it - she pauses, breathes and starts to tell me about this photograph. Within this oral framework, Jan's memories and recollections are reignited and shared. Jan's daughter explains that her mother is proud of these portraits, they are old photographs but remain significant visual markers of her only son's transition through the important ritual of circumcision. As I will continue to discuss the process of viewing Jan's photographs and paying attention to the accompanying biographical narratives as well as the gestures performed when discussing them, succeeds in giving them meaning that may otherwise be missed.

Figure 4. The Emotional Life of Transcultural Photographs: Private Interior I 2013-2018. (© 2022, the author)



THE AUDIBLE NARRATIVE

Inevitably the conversation moves away from the selected photographs. My interest is piqued by a large digital family portrait on display in the main living room, figure 4. The photograph is approximately 20x40cm and is presented in a large golden frame. It sits on the mantelpiece, leaning against the chimney. I refer to Rachel Hurdley's (2006) social research that looks at the placement of objects in the family home, as a pivotal method through which to investigate the value of this image-object. Her research suggests that the management of a domestic display in the home is an active meaning-making process conceptualised as a performance for others. She adds that the mantelpiece as the focal point of the room, and as the

most public place in a family home it is the primary space on which to make a domestic display. It is a 'power space', she argues, on which objects of value are publicly viewed within the home. Hurdley's suggestion that the placement of objects on the mantelpiece is noteworthy. It is also important to mention again that the discussed photograph (figure 4) is the only photograph on the mantelpiece, and moreover the only visual image on display in the home. It is a treasured photograph, placed in the most public place in the home where it acts as an anchor in the room. In the prime viewing spot in the main living area it invites visitors to enquire about its narrative. I am intrigued to know more about this photograph.

This family portrait is a complicated digital photograph that is pixilated, disjointed and lacks visual cohesion. I am told by Jan that it is an important family portrait and indeed the subsequent narrative reveals it to be a highly political photograph that gives insight into a deeply personal family history. This family portrait is unconventional and does not follow standard practices of formal familial portrait photography. It does not capture what Gillian Rose (2010) defines as family photography, this she describes as key moments of family life, such as births, weddings and marriages, when changes are commemorated. It comprises of four separate vernacular portrait photographs (one of the original photographs has two people in it) and an internet sourced background on which the portraits sit. The portraits are of Jan's sister-in-law, that is her husband's sister with the husband of her sister-in-law, and their three children. Most of the photograph is taken up by the head and shoulders portrait of the two adults (Jan's sister-in-law and husband), their portrait likeness is neatly anchored to the bottom of the photograph. The man wears a formal jacket over an unbuttoned checked shirt. The woman is dressed modestly in a long-sleeved patterned blouse, her hair is covered by a scarf. Their posture is that of a traditionally posed couple. What I mean by this is that the man's arms are placed around the shoulders of the woman, which suggests an intimate or familial relationship between them. The three-individual cameo-style portraits of children are placed across the top section of the photograph. All of the portraits have been arranged on top of the digital golden wheat field background over which the sun is setting.

There are sparse visual references for the viewer to connate the meaning of this photograph and little interest is shown by Jan in discussing its aesthetic qualities. When asking specific questions about the construction of this portrait the responses are vague. Information about it such as who commissioned it, who provided the original vernacular photographs and why the background was selected, lack clarity. Speculation can be made about the meaning of the background of this family portrait, a wheat field at sunset. Writer Annebella Pollen (2018) when writing about the ubiquity of mass-produced sunset photographs suggests that, although without doubt a sunset is a visual cliché, that is an idealised background with a conventional sameness, these repetitions exist as visual allegories that show what matters to the producers/owners of the photographs. My suggestion is that this visual cliché is employed to emphasize the meaning of this family portrait. In this context the sunset indicates the end of something. However, whether this is true or not cannot be confirmed because Jan has in fact forgotten who commissioned the photograph and why aesthetics choices were decided. Jan's eldest daughter thinks an auntie commissioned it but is uncertain so can add nothing more to this question. What is interesting about this conversation is that although the details of its production lack clarity, the sharing of the narrative gathers momentum as the story unfolds. For Jan, attention is paid to the meaning of the photograph, not what it looks like. As Camp (2017) highlights, when writing about listening to images, the narrative that accompanies an image gives us access to an affective register through which meaning is made. This portrait image sees the meaning shift from that of the original vernacular portraits as it is narrated. The connotation is unlocked by the significant narrative attributed to the image. The account that accompanies this portrait takes the audience beyond the visual surface and reveals a traumatic familial narrative. Against the nar-

native, this portrait is audible. With the exception of the older man in the image, all the people depicted in this image died being illegally smuggled from Turkey to Britain. The photograph is a memorial family portrait constructed in digital post-production to remember and honour the family members in death. The meaning of this photograph is anchored by its narrative, within the wider cultural context of death, bereavement and photography.⁵ Once shared, the meaning of the photograph remains ever-present.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND MEMORIAL PRACTICES

In order to anchor meaning to this photograph and understand how it is engaged with as a process of mourning, I have conducted secondary research around the cultural histories of Kurdish-Turkish photographic memorial practices, in addition to those that originate in Western Europe/North America. It is important to highlight that when I first meet Jan, she refers to herself as Turkish and only through the biographic narrative does it become apparent that she identifies as British, with a Kurdish-Turkish heritage. Notably, many different identities with contradictory interests and divergent forms of identification shelter under the same diasporic umbrella of the Anglo-Turkish community. Even in self-identifying as part of a diasporic Turkish community, people disagree about what exactly this means. This includes people who, to name a few, self-identify as Turkish, Kurdish, Anglo-Turkish, London-Turkish/Kurdish-Turkish/Turkish-Londoners/Turkish Cypriots, Alevi Kurds, as well as ethnic Turks. This self-identification seems to differ depending on who is asking. Surprisingly, despite ethnic tensions in Turkey between ethnic Kurds and Turks, it is not unusual for ethnic-Kurds to identify as Turkish in London in order to belong to a larger diasporic community. Sara Ahmed (2000) broadens the critical dialogue around diasporic identity by suggesting that there are commonalities in all migrant communities.

The very experience of leaving home and 'becoming a stranger' involves the creation of a new 'community of strangers', a common bond with those others who have 'shared' the experience of living overseas. (Ahmed 2000:84)

Thus, Ahmed puts forward the idea that forming a community, and creating a sense of belonging, is as much about sharing a new home, as it is about sharing an inherited past. This opacity in hyphenated-identities makes it extremely difficult to identify any specific cultural practices. I return to an investigation into Kurdish practices as it is relevant to this case study. Historically, there is a geographical displacement of the ethnic-Kurds across the world, this means identifying cultural practices, such as memorial practices are complicated. In his introduction to Susan Meiselas (1997) book, *Kurdistan: In the Shadow of History*, Van Bruinessen writes about the lack of visibility of the Kurdish people and Kurdish culture. He highlights that there is no longer a homeland for Kurds. The country of Kurdistan he writes was dissolved after the WWII, when the Middle East was redrawn, and the Kurds were left with no homeland. In recent years, the Kurds have become a persecuted ethnic group that live on land that straddles the borders of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. In Turkey, Kurdish language and practices are banned and Kurds are frequently a target of violence and discrimination. The Kurdish identity is assimilated and repressed under a broader Turkish identity. This makes the Kurds an ethnic culture subject to erasure, which means researching and identifying Kurdish cultural practices is complicated. Although there is no evidence of memorial practices for ethnic Kurdish-Turks, this is not the case for Iraqi-Kurds. There are two current examples that demonstrate a resurgence of memorialising the Kurds. These are

the above mentioned, Meiselas's (1997) work *Kurdistan: In the shadow of history*, online and in book format that brings together her photographs that evidence the genocide of Iraqi-Kurds, together with historical maps of the region, heritage portraits and archival documents that confirm the suppression of Kurdish identity inflicted on the Kurds under Saddam Hussain in Iraq, in the late 1980s.⁶ In addition, the online *The Kurdistan Memory Program*, in existence since 2004 that documents the plight of the Iraqi-Kurds through story-telling and pictures.⁷ Both case studies focus on the plight of Kurdish-Iraqis with an over-arching theme of the erasure of Kurdish history. These examples seek to counteract the erasure of the Kurds but neither example specifically mentions a history of memorial practices for ethnic-Kurds. When writing about the Anglo-Kurdish-Turkish community, historian Ipek Demir (2012) points out that it is a common occurrence for Kurdish-Turks to initially identify themselves as Turkish. In this instance, Demir refers to a Kurdish-Turkish identity as an 'invisible' diasporic community. In fact, he identifies that ethnic Kurds from Turkey, despite ethnic suppression in Turkey, find they have more in common with ethnic Turks from Turkey than ethnic Kurds who have other homelands, such as Syria, Iran and Iraq. This he suggests is because there is a shared homeland in Turkey. Thus, for reasons of both common homeland and ethnic security, ethnic Kurdish-Turks are often indistinguishable as a diasporic community in London from the diasporic Turkish community. Within this community Kurdish-Turks have adopted Turkish cultural practices and assimilate with a Turkish identity. This is significant to note because it offers insight into the complexity of Jan's sense of belonging to her land of birth, her cultural identity and new land of homeland.

In the case of memorial practices there is not a history of remembering loved ones through photography in Turkey. According to historian Pelin Aytemiz (2013) there is not even a direct word in Turkish to define the ritual of photographing and depicting the dead. This he explains is because there is no tradition of visually representing the living in Islamic culture. However, contrary to Aytemiz's assertion that there is no tradition of depicting the living in Islamic culture, contemporary scholars such as Ali Behdad and Luke Gartlen (2013), Bahattin Öztuncay (2015) and Sultan Sheehi (2016) write at length about figurative photographic portrait in early Ottoman photography. Nonetheless, when writing about broader practices of remembering the dead through photography in early Ottoman photography, Öztuncay (2015) writes that it was quite a rare occurrence in the Ottoman Empire. This he equates to the fact that portraits of living people were frowned on by conservative Muslims. In addition to which, there was little demand for any kind of memorial photography from the Armenian and Greek communities in the Ottoman Empire, who were traditionally the photographers of the Ottoman empire.

Conversely, there is an established history of using photography as a memorial practice in Western Europe and North America.⁸ An overview of this, starting with Victorian photography, can be read in Audrey Linkman's (2011) book *Photography and Death* which includes examples of post-mortem photography (historically referred to as the last sleep) which is the picturing of the deceased after death and funeral photography and includes documentary photographs of grief stricken mourners alongside of their recently deceased loved ones.⁹ It also includes contemporary examples of practices of photography and death, such as Briony Campbell's (2010/11) *The Dad Project*. Campbell's *The Dad Project* investigates her relationship with her father as he is dying with cancer. Beyond catharsis, in this work she examines her relationship with death and mortality. Furthermore, Linkman refers to the production of memorial portraits of dead relatives as a Memento Mori, that is a memory in death. In Memento-Mori photographs, the deceased are represented when still alive, by this I mean it is common for vernacular family photographs to be used as Memento-Mori images. The discussed photograph, that sits on Jan's mantelpiece, is a memory portrait created to remember loved ones in death. It is helpful to draw from

the writing of anthropologist Jay Ruby (1995) when thinking about the agency of photographs as part of memorial practices. He highlights their value for the mourner. He writes:

Photographs of the deceased provide significant assistance in getting survivors to accept the finality of the loss and begin the essential reintegration of the mourner into society (Ruby 1995:174)

This family portrait is a testament to the family members who did not survive the journey to a new life in Britain. Jan recollects the tragic journey of her loved ones, alongside which she narrates her own journey to Britain. She imparts details of being hidden in an articulated lorry alone for many hours without food or water or any idea of where she was. Looking at this portrait she reflects on her own traumatic memories and gives meaning in this portrait. Marita Sturken's (1999) writing on the multifaceted meaning imbued in photographs of the dead, is also a useful reference point that can be drawn from to understand the meaning of this image. Sturken discusses the value of memorial photography for the owner, she writes:

The personal photograph is an object of complex emotional and cultural meaning, an artifact used to conjure memory, nostalgia, and contemplation. The photograph of personal value is a talisman, in which the past is often perceived to reside so that it is re(-)experienced. It evokes both memory and loss, both in a trace of life and the prospect of death. Yet while the photograph maybe perceived as a container for memory, it is not inhabited by memory as much as it produces it; it is a mechanism through which the past can be constructed and situated within the present. (Sturken 1999:178)

Sturken highlights that a photograph as an object of memory moves the past into the present. The kinds of photographs she refers to can typically be found in a diversity of places such as personal lockets and brooches (Ruby 1995, Batchen 2004) and Victorian photo albums (Linkman 2011). Batchen (2004) highlights that in addition to the photograph, a memory portrait can also be an object from that person such as a lock of hair that is carried with the owner/wearer. More recently Gil Pasternak (2010) expands this history by highlighting the presence of memorial photography as figurative photo-plaques on tomb stones in Israel.¹⁰ In figure 1.4 the past is reconstructed in the present and the image-object is a container for memory.¹¹ This photograph performs as an emotionally charged mnemonic object, an image in memoriam. In presenting this photograph as a memorial image in an intimate setting, it is gazed at, touched and discussed, indeed it performs as what Batchen (2004) calls an 'aide-de-mémoire', that is an aid with which to remember. A hidden history is revealed that contains a specific narrative which is accessed through Jan's biographical account. For Jan's youngest daughter who was born in England, this photograph carries a history, an inherited traumatic memory but not a lived experience. This gives her a different relationship with the photograph. To better understand the fluidity of meaning of this photograph and how it enables mourning practices across generations, I explore in more depth Marianne Hirsch's (1997) writing around 'post-memory'. When discussing her relationship to her own family history of the holocaust, Hirsch talks about 'post-memory' (Hirsch 1997:21-22). She speaks of 'post-memory' as a way of connecting with a past shaped by traumatic events to the present. She points out that 'post-memory' is an inherited memory, but not one that has been lived. Thus, Hirsch suggests that a trace of the memory can be transferred through the agency of the image. Jan's youngest daughter 'remembers' this trauma through the stories told by her family and in doing so the 'affect' of the narrative is mediated. Through the prism of 'post-memory', she has commenced a conversation with the photograph and claimed ownership of the traumatic familial diasporic narrative.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have looked at the mnemonic meaning of photographs in evoking significant memories through which familial narratives of belonging, grief and loss are shared. As already highlighted, I am an outsider to this community and as such have been transparent in placing myself in the text in order to contextualise my enquiries of both the aesthetics of the photographs and cultural rituals and practices documented in them. During this process, at times I feel like an archaeologist searching for clues about the photographs. In paying close attention to what I see and hear the complexity to the photographs come to light, poignant details about the cultural value, as well as personal meaning of the photographs are revealed. I offer new insight into how diasporic identity is mediated through family photography and in doing so the critical relationship between photography, memory/post-memory and migration is examined.

Drawing from one case study, I have examined how personal and familial memories are imbued through photographs and looked at how a sense of diasporic identity is built through an affective register. Reading the selected photographs as memory texts (Kuhn 2011) and drawing from what Langford (2001:241) refers to as an ‘oral photographic performance’, these photographs are animated and can be heard. The personal narratives shared alongside of the photographs gives insight their meaning for Jan and family, which proves a successful method of piecing together the mnemonic implications of the narratives. The conversations uncover glimpses of how Jan navigates her relationship with her children alongside of negotiating the politics and attachment to her new homeland. The close reading of these photographs as well as connoting their importance for Jan and her family also gives insight into her feeling of belonging in Britain. The photographs include, moments of celebration and success, which for Jan signal being part of Britain. In addition, the family portrait that sits on Jan’s mantelpiece in the main living area holds a hidden traumatic family history.

It is a highly political image that without the accompanying narrative, negates meaning. As already stressed in the body of the essay, this portrait is what Batchen (2004:64) refers to as a ‘tangible metaphor’, whose significance rests in the narrative rather than the visual. It is a testament to the family members who were unable to complete their journey to a new homeland and becomes a place in which to remember them in death.¹² In sharing a close ethnographic reading of this photograph, generalisations and assumptions about its significance are dispelled.¹³ Ironically, although specific details about the construction of the portrait remain vague, there is no mystery as to why it was created and what it means for Jan and her family. Meaning is made through an affective register, by this I mean that the oral narration, the anecdotes, gestures, expressions, and haptic interaction with the portrait, rather than its visual accuracy is what uncovers its value. Western European cultural practices of mourning the passing of loved ones with photographs have been adopted and adapted in this photograph, which becomes a prism through which family grief is shared. The portrait is a testament to the violent nature of death and plays an important role in mitigating the finality of death. In sharing the biographical narrative that accompanies the portrait, in addition to discussing her own vulnerabilities of arriving in Britain as an illegal migrant, Jan positions herself within the socio-cultural network of the narrative. Its meaning transcends beyond the personal and speaks to a broader cultural narrative that hints at the fragility and rupture of migration. The accompanying narrative is repeatedly told, and the memory shifts. In doing so, the past is re-negotiated in the present. The narrative offered by Jan, takes the photograph beyond a personal experience, it becomes a collective memory which is jointly owned by the family. Finally, the memory embed in this photograph is reframed as a post-memory, as it is re-absorbed across subsequent generations into the present. What I am suggesting is, in short, this photograph helps navigate this fam-

ily's traumatic migratory history. It allows recollections and presentations of a highly significant familial narrative and acts as a certification of the continual presence of family members who did not survive the journey to Britain. It is a reminder of the lives unlived. Furthermore, it facilitates a collapse of boundaries between past and present and enables Jan and her family to deal with the rupture that separates family members in death. In sharing the narratives of the selected photographs, they are animated and brought into the present. The narratives are collectively claimed as family memories/post-memories and in doing so they extend beyond the personal and experiential and give insight into the diasporic identity of Jan and her family.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am in gratitude to my PhD supervisors Professor Patrizia Di Bello and Dr Emma Sandon at Birkbeck, University of London, for their patience through my research journey, during which the research refused to sit within one discipline. The criticality with which they approached the supervision has transformed me as a critical thinker.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ Jan is a pseudonym. Although the participant agreed to be named, in the interest of keeping her anonymity beyond the initial PhD thesis to which she contributed, her name has been replaced in this essay.

- 2 Surprisingly although a family portrait was offered in exchange for the interview, Jan was not interested in me doing this. I can speculate that Jan had agreed to be interviewed at the request of her daughter and was being and that the clumsy manner with which I conducted the interview didn't inspire her with confidence in my ability to make a successful family portrait.
- 3 I have permission to reproduce and discuss these family images.
- 4 Sources differ in terms of the name of the circumcision outfit and circumcision ritual. Sahin (2018) who writes specifically about Ottoman-Turkish practices, refers to the circumcision outfit as the *sûnnet* outfit. The Encyclopedia Britannica refs to *Khitân* as the Islamic ritual of circumcision. The participants I interviewed refer to the ceremonial outfit at his circumcision party and ceremonial ritual simply as a circumcision outfit.
- 5 This is a private portrait owned by Jan, which has been shared with her extended family. Jan has agreed to share the narrative of this photograph and I have been given permission to reproduce and discuss it. However, there is politic in doing this. The people in this photograph have not given their permission to be either part of this image or this chapter. This presents an ethical dilemma that needs to be acknowledged, if not completely mitigated. Although it has become common practice to share photographs of the dead as narratives of migration, there is a responsibility with sharing any image when the subject of that image is unable to give consent. This includes acknowledging the privacy of the subjects and working sensitively with their image.
- 6 'Kurdistan: In the shadow of history' was a long-term online archive project (1991-2008) <https://www.susanmeiselas.com/archive-projects/kurdistan/>
- 7 'The Kurdistan Memory Program' <https://kurdistanmemoryprogramme.com/>
- 8 The scope of memorial photography is a discipline in its own right that extends beyond the scope of this essay.
- 9 Post-Mortem photography draws its history from 1600s posthumous commemorative painting.
- 10 This point is also made by Ruby (1995). Memorial photography as figurative plaques on tomb stones is not specific to Israel. Memorial plaques can be seen across Europe in France, Italy and Greece. However, according to Pasternak (2010) it is noteworthy in Israel because it is a new and subversive practice.
- 11 Ruby (1995) writes that there is a history to migrating images of the dead into images of living family members. He writes that in the absence of a family member (absence in death) this makes a family portrait complete.
- 12 *In Doing Family Photography* (2010) Rose eloquently argues that looking at images of the dead requires active work from the viewer to enact ethical responsibility. She is critical of mass media usage of images of the dead, as a way of activating emotional responses to a media narrative. In using images in this way, she argues that the complexity of the image is reduced to symbols of grief. She adds although that there are no agreed universal ethics when viewing images of the dead, a process of reflection is needed. Rose advises at the very least an acknowledgement of this ethical issue and sensitivity to the subjects is required when using vernacular family images of people who are not able to give consent for the usage of their images.
- 13 The photograph is distributed to extended family members in order to commemorate the death of their loved ones.