

**Be/come Closer to Home: Narratives of Contested Lands in the Visual Practices
of Katerina Attalidou and Alexandra Handal**

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In the last few decades, there has been a significant growth in the visibility of women artists from Cyprus and Palestine who have produced art that questions and challenges both their social position and their complex histories. Women from Cyprus and Palestine are citizens of divided countries and have experienced conspiracies and invasions that have confiscated their homelands. Both countries share a long and violent history and are, still to this day, oppressed by the Green Line borders.¹ The divided cities of Nicosia (Cyprus) and Jerusalem (Palestine) are scarred by wars and ethnic conflicts that have left open wounds that are socially, intellectually, and culturally embedded.

In this article the concepts of 'home' and 'homeland' are used to contextualise visual practices produced in Nicosia by Greek-Cypriot artist Katerina Attalidou and Jerusalem by Alexandra Handal. This article will reflect on artists' experiences of borders (both physical and psychological), location, and narrations of homeland (both 'lost' and existing). To make this, I will argue how the idea of homeland *real* or *imagined*, is represented in visual works by the two artists. Through the discussion of images I will explore how these practices serve as a reminder of exile and develop a critical understanding of contemporary events and our reaction to them.

¹ Cyprus and Palestine have been selected as the focus of this article due to the similar socio-political conditions. In 1947, the United Nations proposed a resolution for the creation of independent Arab and Jewish States and the Special International Regime for the City of Jerusalem. Soon after the adoption of the Resolution by the General Assembly, the civil war broke out. Cyprus has been divided since 1974 when Turkey invaded in response to a military coup, which was backed by the Greek government.

Home, House, Homeland

In exploring strategies in the representation of home, I discuss specific visual themes that embody the Green Line and the exilic conditions of refugees in Cyprus and Palestine. The cities of Nicosia and Jerusalem become spaces for negotiation of the two artists who experience the division and the geo-political partition of their homelands. Through their visual strategies both Attalidou and Handal represent exilic discourse in conversing with the geo-political partition. Significant to this is Hamid Naficy's point that exile discourse 'thrives on detail, specificity, and locality.'²

In addressing the exilic conditions, I explore certain women's artistic interventions of specific contested territories. John Peters defines the concept of exile as a 'painful or punitive banishment from one's homeland' and that it 'implies a fact of trauma, an imminent danger, usually political that makes the home no longer safely habitable.'³ As I will discuss later in this article, in Cyprus and Palestine exile is a forced displacement that is 'inexorably tied to homeland and to the possibility of return.'⁴ Hamid Naficy, in defining exile, points out three of its associated concepts: house, home and homeland. He explains:

*House*⁵ is the literal object, the material place in which one lives, and it involves legal categories of rights, property, and possession and their opposites. *Home* is anyplace; it is temporary and it is moveable; it can be built, rebuilt and carried in memory and by acts of imagination. [...] *Homeland* has

² Hamid Naficy, 'Introduction: Framing Exile', in Hamid Naficy, ed, *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media, and the Politics of Place*, Routledge, London, 1999, p 4

³ John Durham Peters, 'Exile, Nomadism, and Diaspora', in Hamid Naficy, ed, *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media, and the Politics of Place*, Routledge, London, 1999, p 19

⁴ Hamid Naficy, op cit, p 3

⁵ All quote's emphasis in the original

been the most absolute, abstract, mythical, and fought for of the three notions.’⁶

The political conflict in Cyprus and Palestine resulted in a mass-population forced exile accompanied by ‘shock, disruption or loss [...] together with the distance from the home’s mundane realities, [...] the original state of being.’⁷ Attalidou’s and Handal’s work present us with an opportunity to explore the ways in which politicised narrations of home emerge as visual interventions of history, memory, belonging, longing, and understanding of homeland.

Crossing the Green Line

Katerina Attalidou’s installation *A Stroll Without Boundaries As Much As History Allows* (2003) addresses the concept of homeland and offers a dynamic interaction between the realities of the present and the memories of the past. For the exhibition space of her installation Attalidou chose a dusty attic with a low ceiling of a deserted shop in the centre of the old city of Nicosia. The installation was composed by a series of framed images exhibited as a single unit on a wall, without gaps in-between the frames. Opposite the wall was an armchair with a footstool, and lying near the wall on the floor was a TV. For Attalidou, the making of this installation functioned as a means of demonstrating and elaborating ideas about the concept of a homeland that is divided by the Green Line.

For twenty-nine years the Green Line in Cyprus was a closed border with only two checkpoints – one in Nicosia and the other in Pyla village. Permission has always been required from the administration of the so-called Republic of Northern Cyprus

⁶ Hamid Naficy, op cit, pp 5-6

⁷ John Durham Peters, op cit, p 19

(TRNC) to cross in either direction. In 2003, the authorities of the TRNC opened the Green Line and any citizen could cross with no permission required.⁸ After the official opening of Ledra's barricade (in Nicosia), residents from both communities were able to cross backwards and forwards, walking into the territory that for the past three decades was known as the 'death zone'. The opening of the barricade provided Attalidou her first opportunity to access a formerly banned territory – a territory that for over three decades was exposed to her through stories she had heard and images she had conjured up in her imagination:

I have spent years trying to imagine, to understand my surroundings. I kept on, I keep on contemplating the beauty and the decadence of the city. At times I would close my eyes and allow my thoughts to stroll around the Venetian walls, redefining the cycle which has been interrupted by the separation line.⁹

Born in 1973 in Nicosia, Attalidou, an artist trained in Greece and France, experienced the instability of the divided capital and produced art having the geopolitical partition of her homeland as a subject in her practice. In 2003, Attalidou could for the first time visit the parts she had never seen before and the places she had heard stories about for over thirty years. She could see and experience what was for her until then 'the other side, the view from above, was becoming a real visual sensual stimulation'.¹⁰ While she was strolling around the city she took photographs and drew what was visually intriguing to her. Attalidou's own assessment of her work is fascinating for how she observes and collects material:

⁸ For more see Cynthia Cockburn, *The Line: Women, Partition and the Gender Order in Cyprus*, London, ZedBooks, 2004

⁹ Communication with Katerina Attalidou, 2013

¹⁰ Ibid

I found myself having a lot of material on my hands without being sure of how to utilise it. This was until I emptied my grandfather's paternal house near the Green Line and got into my hands the house's paintings, symbols of an entire era: surgery scenes, landscapes, meals. Grandfather had lived in a time when Nicosia had not been divided, had not been abandoned, in a large house next to the walls. These paintings offered immediately the sense of time to my strolls.¹¹

A Stroll Without Boundaries As Much As History Allows negotiates the past and the present of Attalidou's divided homeland. With the opening of the barricades Attalidou was confronted by the reality of the present and the memories (stories she had heard) of the past. Using the old frames and pictures she discovered in her grandparent's house, she merged the actual material she found (old family photographs and engravings) with the sketches and photographs she collected during her strolls. The result was an assemblage of narratives of homeland (both 'lost' and existing) that functioned as a container for belonging and remembering. The wall of the installation *A Stroll Without Boundaries As Much As History Allows* presents a setting where several framed images are positioned. Among others are photographs of the city's deserted streets and houses, statues, butcher's shops, and a self-portrait in pencil. What is interesting in Attalidou's installation is the dynamics of historical narration employed through a visual intervention; images of the past are being altered into collages that share a common need to understand the reality of the current socio-political conditions of homeland. There is a strong sense of paradox in some of the images. One of them is a black and white photograph in which an Orthodox church is presented in the foreground while a collage of a mosque is positioned in the

¹¹Ibid

background. Another image shows a black and white drawing of doctors investigating the old city of Nicosia, which is presented on an operating table. These visual codes through which Attalidou negotiates memory and longing are a powerful device in questioning national fragments of a divided homeland. I would suggest that Attalidou's engagement of combining material (from the past and present) forms a powerful strategy in re-negotiating the post-1974 trauma. Attalidou's evocative strategy is direct; she transforms a landscape photograph (of the Orthodox church and the mosque) into reminder-instruments that act as metaphors of trauma and memory.

Attalidou negotiates in her practice Cyprus' division and shows her view of the conflict between the two communities. In her image of the operating table seven doctors are presented operating on a map of the old city of Nicosia. The map enacts a historical topography, which aims to evoke a memory of the former state of Nicosia as whole and the time in which Attalidou's ancestral house was still inhabited by its owners. Interestingly, the vast Venetian wall surrounding the old city of Nicosia is an eye-catching image when seen in aerial photography, whereas the Green Line is almost invisible. Here, Attalidou questions ethnic separatism in the post-1974 period in which Nicosia was and still is divided by the two communities. It is clear that Attalidou presents in her work a direct tactical approach loaded with symbols that stages contemporary politics in Cyprus. This is obvious in her image of the butcher's shop. The image is a black and white photograph, representing in the foreground one woman and four men, while in the background there is a photograph of a shop with the label 'Butcher – Kasap'. The appearance of the figures, men are all in suits, gives the impression that they are members of the middle and higher classes. Two of them are shaking hands, indicating that they are possibly politicians. I suggest that

Attalidou's political position is clear; she symbolically depicts Cyprus' situation as a male-dominated country.

It is useful here to look again at the title of the installation - *A Stroll Without Boundaries As Much As History Allows* – suggesting that there is a sense of reunification after so long. However, Attalidou includes in her installation a drawing of the Green Line, depicting a building across the Green Line's wires and a sign that says 'UN Stop No Photography access only for UN vehicles and staff'. Here, Attalidou reproduces the hostile militaristic environment of the Green Line. The Green Line dividing Cyprus is in fact a double line, with an area of 'no man's land' between two parallel fences. The line that Greek-Cypriots call the 'dead zone' is one of the most militarised areas of the world in relation to its population; posters that read *Dead Zone; No Entry: Occupied Zone; Beware Mine Fields; Buffer UN Zone* are found across the Green Line. The flags of five armies are seen in various locations: the Cyprus Republic flag, the Greek flag, the Turkish flag, the TRNC flag, the UN flag and, more recently, the EU flag all act as reminders of the prevailing nationalisms of the island. Attalidou employs such powerful national symbols in her work; she displays in one of her images the TRNC flag. At the same time she exposes the vulnerability that the Green Line imposed in the post-1974 period. Such vulnerability is obvious in the installation's stillness: the low lighting and the hidden camera somewhere in the space. Faced with this vulnerability, the installation exposes Attalidou new reality of division. Considering that Attalidou included in some of the installation's images drawings of herself, her partner and child, I suggest that she is no longer looking at the division from a distance, but rather she is facing the new reality and comes to terms with it in her visual interpretations.

Dream Homes Property Consultants (DHPC)

The concept of homeland and the limitations of the Green Line are obvious in Alexandra Handal's practice. Born in 1975 into a Palestinian family in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Handal is influenced by the 1948 Palestinian depopulation from West Jerusalem and the on-going Palestinian occupation by Israel. After an international education in Paris, France; Madrid, Spain; New York and Boston, USA; London, UK, Handal produced and directed a series of politically motivated films focusing on narrations of memory and exile. Her filmography includes the on-going (since 2007) interactive web documentary project *Dream Homes Property Consultants (DHPC)*.¹² The documentary's title gives an obvious sign of what to expect from the project: property advertisements.

DHPC appears to be an ordinary real estate agency website with a contemporary layout that contains the professionally designed menu: 'About us', 'Hot Properties', 'Neighbourhoods', 'New Projects', 'Testimonials', 'F.A.Q', 'Terms & Conditions' and 'Contact us'. The eighteen houses featured under 'Hot Properties' are described as 'Arab-style' houses located at various locations of West Jerusalem, such as: 'Ayn Karim, Baq'a (Upper and Lower), German Colony, Greek Colony, Mamillah, Musrara, Qatamon, Sa'ad wa-Sa'id, Shamma' and Talbiyen. Each property has a different description, such as 'Enchanting Arab-style House in a Narrow Alley, A Rare Find', 'Lovely Arab-style House, with a Real Old World Charm' and 'Marvelous Arab-style House with a Distinct Allure, A Must Have'. Each property webpage offers images and an account for when the house was built (from the late 1880's to 1948) and the story of its owners. This is followed by images of handmade maps by members of the family for whom the house was built and instructions on

¹² *Dream Homes Property Consultants*, <http://www.dreamhomespropertyconsultants.com/>

how to reach the property. The handmade maps and instructions are based on the Palestinians refugees' memory of the streets and buildings, as they were prior to 1948.

Handal's on-going process of this web documentary exposes the reality of the post-1948 absurd political situation in West Jerusalem where expropriated Palestinian houses are being sold in Israeli real estate agents' websites. The realisation of this absurd political reality was the persuasive point for Handal's engagement in this issue:

The idea for the work grew from an encounter I made in the early 1990s. During a trip to NYC, I met a Palestinian refugee and he showed me a real estate advertisement that featured upscale residential properties in West Jerusalem. At first glance, there was nothing particularly special about this ad, but the absurd political reality around it became evident after he explained to me that this was in fact his family's expropriated home that was now on sale for an Israeli international clientele. I was a teenager at the time and the story had an enduring impact on me – beneath the glossy surface of the ad was a cruel reality.¹³

In negotiating this cruel reality Handal constructs an innovative passage for her practice: the online web documentary in which she welcomes the explorer with the phrase 'Fadalleh! Please, come in'. Her strategy to contextualise the loss of the Palestinian homeland acts as an ironic response to Israeli state's restrictions and actions to eliminate the Palestinian presence: 'I punctuate the official narrative tone of a historical real estate agency with small stories that reflect the house in question,

¹³Karmah Elmusa, *Alexandra Handal Combines Palestinian History and Art in Web Documentary* [online] [Accessed 25 May 2015] Available from <http://imeu.org/article/alexandra-handal-combines-palestinian-history-and-art-in-web-documentary>

bringing to the light the Palestinian refugee memory'.¹⁴ Hamid Naficy provides an insightful account of the creation of virtual homepages:

For many cosmopolitan “homeless” exiles who are physically displaced, an Internet homepage is an attractive method for becoming discursively emplaced. Like all acts of psychic displacement and condensation, however, homepage creation and cyber-community formations involve highly complex and cathected psychological and political economies that are, on one hand, fraught with anxieties, affects, associations, and politics of all kinds, and with intriguing possibilities for liberatory diasporic and feminist multicultural practices on the other.¹⁵

What makes the work even more intriguing is the fact that the ‘true subjects’ of the homepage *DHPC* are ‘not the houses but the people whose lives were changed irrevocably when they were forced to leave them behind.’¹⁶ The digitised world of *DHPC* deploys a modernizing narrative of homeland: images, handmade maps and the owners’ biographical details construct a connection to the places where exiled people lived, worked and considered home.

The online mechanism of *DHPC* acts as an elaboration of the paradox that all refugees experience: they can only return to their homes as quests. Normally, we use the term ‘refugee’ for a person who is outside their home country. However, in the case of Cyprus and Palestine, refugees might live just a few miles away and are prevented from returning to their homes. There is a deeper, psychological, emotional

¹⁴ Alexandra Handal, ‘Chronicles From The Field’ in Linda Sandino and Matthew Partington, ed, *Oral History in The Visual Arts*, London, Bloomsbury, 2013, p 49

¹⁵ Hamid Naficy, op cit, p 4

¹⁶ Alexandra Handal, *Dream Homes Property Consultants (DHPC)*, MIT Open Documentary Lab [online] [Accessed 25 May 2015] Available from <http://docubase.mit.edu/project/dream-homes-property-consultants/>

and mental reality for these people, which both Attalidou and Handal explore in their work. This reality becomes a visual testimony of exile and memory. Significantly, both artists employ on a similar approach to remove the distance and be/come closer to the spaces that are on the other side of their respective Green Line.

Be/come Closer to Home

The desire to document socio-political events of her homeland is obvious in Handal's work. In the artist's statement for *No Parking Without Permission, Jerusalem*, Handal describes her longing to explore the occupied areas:

I wanted to go see first-hand what had become of those neighbourhoods whose stories had shaped my image of the city. So I decided to undertake a number of walks there. Although walking through a city would almost anywhere in the world be seen as a mundane activity, for a Palestinian drifting in Jerusalem is politicised and loaded with emotional ramifications. Through numerous walks, I explored these areas by looking through all sorts of barriers, fences, gates and bushes in an attempt to remove the distance and be/come closer to the spaces that Palestinians were torn apart from in 1948. These drifts culminated into a series of photos, each image – a visual testimony of my yearning.¹⁷

In the 2008 series *No Parking Without Permission, Jerusalem* a form of visual testimony takes place through an exploration of the homes that were dispossessed from the owners in 1948. Capturing what was visible through looking barriers, gates, fences and bushes these testimonies act as sites of memory that contextualise the events of the loss and what was 'left behind' in the various neighbourhoods of West Jerusalem. Glimpses of the houses' exterior, the yard and garden plants create the

¹⁷ Communication with Alexandra Handal, 2015

space for a longing homeland; an imagined, yet real, homeland. I suggest this imagined homeland acts as a transitional space between the Palestinian narratives Handal heard growing up and what Handal calls as a ‘torn social, cultural and intellectual fabric’.¹⁸ According to Maria Holt the imagined home involves a power narrative:

There is a tension between the need to recreate home, a secure place in which to enact family life, and a notion of home that exists [...] ‘only in imagination’. The majority of refugees have an idea of what Palestine looks or looked like and they are aware of the symbolic meanings it possesses. This is a very powerful narrative; although it does not constantly preoccupy them, it is ready to emerge as a compelling discourse, when individuals are invited to reflect.¹⁹

As a site of remembrance, the twelve photographs seem frozen in time. Their stillness calls to us as a reminder of the past, bringing together the corporality of memory itself, as a crossing point of past and present, reality and imagination. Significantly, *No Parking Without Permission, Jerusalem* has a powerful title. It implies that one cannot use an allocated space without the owner’s permission. In the context of Jerusalem, ‘no parking without permission’ invokes ‘a politically charged take on issues of trespassing, boundaries and ownership, given that the Palestinian built environment is being appropriated, destroyed and occupied by Israel.’²⁰ Handal’s photographs of West Jerusalem speak to memory, loss and absence. The images at the same time fascinate and disturb. The politicised imagery bears

¹⁸ Alexandra Handal, *Dream Homes Property Consultants (DHPC)* [Trailer-Video Documentation] [online] [Accessed 24 May 2015] Available from <http://www.dreamhomespropertyconsultants.com/>

¹⁹ Maria Holt, *Women and Conflict in the Middle East: Palestinian Refugees and the Response to Violence*, London, I.B.Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2014, p 2

²⁰ Communication with Alexandra Handal, 2015

intimidation as it represents pain, despair and longing for the lost homeland. A homeland that is not accessible without 'authorised' permission. A homeland that is limited to glimpses through barriers of it and visual testimonies of its exterior.

The historical power of the exilic trauma, as Cathy Caruth argues, 'is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that [it] is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all.'²¹ I suggest that Handal's strategies in representing exile might be understood within Caruth's argument that 'since the traumatic event is not experienced as it occurs it is fully evident only in connection with another place, another time.'²² There is a politicised perspective in tracing and mapping data from past histories to create new narrative spaces for the international audience to explore. This is also evident in the production of *DHPC*, which was created after Handal realised that Israeli real estate agencies used the confiscated Palestinian homes within an imagined Israeli political context:

The images that are commonly featured on such commercial websites are informal domestic snapshots, where images of quotidian life are on display in order to imagine oneself in that space.²³

While for the wider audience the advertised space is a commodity, for Handal the images 'became a way to access a suppressed history. I got a glimpse of what became of the homes of Palestinian refugees from West Jerusalem.'²⁴ For Handal, to take photographs of expropriated Palestinian houses is to participate in the refugees' exilic

²¹ Cathy Caruth, 'Introduction', in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1995, p 8

²² Ibid

²³ Karmah Elmusa, op cit

²⁴ Ibid

reality. According to Susan Sontag, a photograph is 'both a pseudo-presence' and a 'token of absence'.²⁵ Within Handal's context, photographs are a reminder of a lost (and existing) homeland, a reminder of the Palestinian absence (and presence). Her visual intervention allows us to remember each time we look the absurd Palestinian reality: the loss of their homes and their identity-status as refugees. There is a tremendous, intimate vulnerability that speaks loudly of the human conditions in post-war times. Handal's work acts as a powerful metaphor for the physical, emotional and social restraint Palestinian refugees have experienced since 1948. Nadia Theodorie talks about her refugee experience in the 2013 short film *On a Winter's Night* (7 min. 50 sec):

We came to Bethlehem in 1948. It was May 12, 1948. For 4 families there was only one truck for our belongings. We were not only the 4 families but also a few friends, in total about 24 people in one house. We were on top of each other. We thought it was only for two weeks, but here we are 60 years later, from 1948 until today we are still in Bethlehem. The catastrophe is that I cannot reach Jerusalem. I need a permit. Jerusalem is my city and I cannot go there? This is the catastrophe.²⁶

Nadia Theodorie, like the majority of refugees, thought her accommodation in the refugee housing was a temporary one. *On a Winter's Night* shows scenes of the house that two elderly siblings (Nadia and Teddy Theodorie) built during their sixty-six years in exile from Jerusalem. They search through their library and show to the camera photos from the family album and an identity card issued in 23 August 1944 by the Government of Palestine during the British Mandate.

²⁵ Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, London, Penguin Books, p 16

²⁶ *Dream Homes Property Consultants (DHPC)* [online] [Accessed 24 May 2015] Available from <http://www.dreamhomespropertyconsultants.com/neighbourhoods/talbiyeh>

In *Tête d'un Homme (Portrait of a Man)* (3 min 42 sec, short film, 2013) a Palestinian refugee, Elie Ayoub, tells the story of a distressing departure and an accidental meeting in Germany with someone who he knew in Jerusalem before 1948. Ayoub says about his upsetting departure:

[...]We had to flee and leave Qatamon [...] And we started our new life. We got out of Qatamon without anything at all. We started everything from scratch. For someone to be occupying my home while I live 2 km away and I cannot enter in my home... This is very difficult to deal with. The impact of it is immense on us.²⁷

The Key to the House

Memoirs of the family photo album and the key to the abandoned house are among the few belongings refugees have taken into exile. In particular the key becomes a ‘powerful synecdoche for the lost house and the unreachable home, feeding the memories of the past and the narratives of exile.’²⁸ Many refugees, before departing, locked their houses and kept the key to the home, because one day they hoped to return. The familiar household was the most common loss for refugees (particularly women) who, in losing their home, experienced both a ‘material and symbolic deprivation’: as Maria Roussou puts it,

²⁷*Dream Homes Property Consultants (DHPC)* [online] [Accessed 24 May 2015] Available from <http://www.dreamhomespropertyconsultants.com/neighbourhoods/qatamon>

²⁸ Hamid Naficy, op cit, p 6

In short all the material world they were acquainted with and which was theirs had been taken away overnight. Their flight [...] was so sudden that none of them was able to take any of their most precious movable belongings.²⁹

Thus, the key to their home was the only thing that linked their new status as refugees to their past lives. After their departure, the key to the home was the only material item that refugee parents could offer as a heritage and as a memory to their children. The abandoned house is a common cause of sorrow for refugees of all nationalities. Exilic trauma is such a shocking experience that can only be shared with someone who is also suffering: as Peter Loizos put it, 'it takes a refugee to understand one.'³⁰

Themes of exile, identity, belonging and memory are dominant in Attalidou's 2005 installation *Legislated Nostalgia, Now Denial*, presented at the 'Leaps of Faith' exhibition. For the installation, Attalidou has as a starting point narration of Nicosia of people living inside the Venetia walls of Nicosia:

This time I set off with a portable tape recorder. I would ask the people I encountered to talk to me about their relationship to the city, the way they perceive the changes, about their feelings towards the opening of the barricade. The stories I heard were similar on both sides of the divide. Descriptions of a time when the heart of the city was the centre of the life of Nicosia, when the deserted workshops were full of life, sound and movement.³¹

²⁹ Maria Roussou. *Greek Cypriot Women in Contemporary Cyprus with Special Reference to the 1974 War and its Consequences*, University of London, Institute of Education, [Unpublished Ph.D. thesis], 1985, p 99

³⁰ Peter Loizos, *The Heart Grown Bitter: a Chronicle of Cypriot War Refugees*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981, p 127

³¹ Communication with Katerina Attalidou, 2013

The opening of the Green Line borders initiated various bi-communal projects taking place in both parts of Nicosia. The 2005 'Leaps of Faith' was a pioneering event that was held on various locations near the Green Line: '...the aim of the event was to enliven and reactivate public spaces and locations of the town of Nicosia and of the Green Line'.³² Attalidou's installation comprises photographs she captured during her strolls, merged in an imaginative technique:

During my strolls I would also take photos. At night, back in my studio transcribing the interviews, I would also look at the photos taken during the day. Using techniques such as monotype and printing in layers I was trying to give an image to the sensation I had been left with by my stroll and the encounters of the day. I was trying to render the memory, the dust, and the beauty. This is how the series of images that are exhibited created.³³

Similar to the 2003 installation *A Stroll Without Boundaries As Much As History Allows*, Attalidou's 2005 installation comprises photographic representations of Nicosia's constructions and houses. The compositions, merged together in different layers, feature places Attalidou encountered during her strolls: a sign saying 'Justice Party – Protection of People's Rights', an office decorated with photos from a family album, a coffee shop, an old shed with a big image of the 'Stop' traffic sign, a terrace with clothes, a sex shop and a bedroom's interior. I suggest that Attalidou's installation is directly associated with the ongoing political situation in Cyprus, with key reference to its territory and nostalgia for the past. Attalidou employs on juxtaposing the images to create a nostalgic setting that seems to be taken from another era. Exile, remembrance and loss are pivotal elements in Attalidou's

³² EKATE, *50 Years of Artistic Creation*, Nicosia, Proteas Printing Press, 2010, p 125

³³ Communication with Katerina Attalidou, 2013

practice. The images of the *Legislated Nostalgia, Now Denial* installation communicate narrations of Nicosia without boundaries, intertwining the past and present. One of the visuals, titled *Happy is the One Who Can Call Himself Alive*, shows portraits on the wall of a shop in the Nicosia old city. The title is an alternation of the Turkish-Cypriot statement written at the Ayios Dometios checkpoint 'Happy is the one who can call himself a Turk'. I propose that the alternation of words stands as a cynical response of the conflicted political situation in Cyprus and of the ongoing sovereignly control of the two communities over the unsolved Cyprus problem. Attalidou's nostalgic imagery embodies a narration of the geo-political partition challenging the division of her homeland and the diverse narratives across the Green Line.

The physical and emotional departure from homeland is pivotal in Handal's *From The Bed & Breakfast Notebooks* (13 min 46 sec, short film, 2007-2009). The film shows Handal's travel account of a thirteen-night accommodation she conducted as a 'tourist' in 2007, at an expropriated Palestinian home that is now converted to an Israeli bed and breakfast in West Jerusalem: as Handal says, she 'wanted to capture the feeling of the place as [she] experienced it'.³⁴ The film unfolds multiple accounts intertwined through different layers of visual, sound and text uncovering what Handal refers to as 'like a crime of scene investigation – the remnants of a denied past against an oppressive present'.³⁵ The short film starts with black and white stills of the interior of a house, which Hadal recorded, hand held in upside down mode. This is followed by a mixture of stills from Handal's strolls around the city and its houses with backgrounds of the city's soundscape and oral testimonies by Palestinian

³⁴ Communication with Alexandra Handal, 2015

³⁵ Ibid

refugees, together with an account of an airport body search conducted by an Israeli woman soldier on a refugee Palestinian woman. Refugee man Ari talks about a couple's departure:

Not even one family remains here, they all left this area in 1948, I remember. Then, a honeymooner, also part of our family, they were to get married, you know, and prepared his home – I'll show you now – and the war broke and they left everything, new furniture and they were thinking they would come back after. They took the key of the apartment, you know, and never came back. I'll show you the home.³⁶

The oral testimony accounts for a common refugee story: having the key to the house in their possession and the expectation to return. The desire to return to the occupied parts was, and still is, for many refugees in Cyprus and Palestine, a return associated with a specific territory, engaged greatly by the 'myth of return'. As Roger Zetter points out, this myth 'evoke[s] a familiar, idealised past and sustain[s] the memory of collective loss' while it associates the 'concreteness of a familiar home or "point fixed in space"'.³⁷ Peter Loizos writes, in regard to the chronicles of Greek-Cypriot refugees, that:

Their loss was outside the provisions of conventional social structure and social organisation [...] There was no mourning ceremony for the loss of home, fields, village, and way of life. Not only that, but the public world of politics gave no support to the idea that the loss [...] might be a permanent one.³⁸

³⁶ Alexandra Handal, *From The Bed & Breakfast Notebooks* short film, 2007-2009

³⁷ Zetter, Roger, 'Reconceptualizing the Myth of Return: Continuity and Transition Amongst the Greek-Cypriot Refugees of 1974', in *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Vol. 12, Issue 1, 1999, p. 4

³⁸ Peter Loizos, op cit, p 131

For refugees in Cyprus and Palestine, their departure signified the loss of their houses and everything with which they had identified themselves with before they were forced to abandon in order to save their lives. Handal's film offers a dynamic conception of the paradox reality of the refugees: they can only return to their homes as guests. *From The Bed & Breakfast Notebooks* offers testimony of an exchange between a Palestinian refugee man and an Israeli woman when the man visits his home:

Woman: *Ah, wars, wars. Ah, peace, peace.*

Man: *Peace. What peace, when you take my home.*

Woman: *Yes, peace.*

Man: *Where is the peace?*

Woman: *There is a peace.*

Man: *Give us our home and there is a peace.*

Woman: *It's awful that you see me now live in your house and, and it's yours, it's awful.*

Man: *It's ache for me.*

Woman: *It's awful.*³⁹

Jacques Derrida defines ethics as hospitality and hospitality as ethics: 'hospitality is not removed from ethics, nor is it a specific area of ethics. It is the foundation or the

³⁹ Alexandra Handal, *From The Bed & Breakfast Notebooks* short film, 2007-2009

“whole and the principle of ethics”⁴⁰ Mark Westmoreland draws on Derrida’s discussion and writes:

The master of the home, the host, must welcome in foreigner, a stranger, a guest, without any qualifications, including having never been given an invitation. Such an invitation as a host offering his or hers home to a guest implies a sort of exchange between the two – “the most inhospitable exchange possible”.⁴¹

The current occupants cannot be seen as guests – they were never invited to that space – but in the current political situation, strangers occupy expropriated homes. This becomes intriguing when we take into account the traditional Cypriot and Palestinian culture of hospitality: a cordial welcome is expected for a guest. What happens though when this ‘guest’ was not invited but, on the contrary, invaded the dwelling of someone else? Considering that both parties claim the property to be their own, the issue of memory and trauma takes on a crucial role in the specific political situation. The legal owner of the house cannot be expected to hand over the key to the house, particularly after a conflict imposed exile on the original owner and offered the house to the present one. The powerful imagery in Attalidou’s and Handal’s practice challenges the geo-political partition of their respective homeland which is still negotiating its division. Their visual and communicative interventions have embodied the exilic condition as a subject-theme, voicing in this way their position and understanding of contemporary events. Both artists develop visual strategies though the past (memories and old visual material) and the present (their ‘crossings’ and

⁴⁰ Quoted in Mark Westmoreland, ‘Interruptions: Derrida and Hospitality’, in *Kritike*, Vol. 2, Issue 1, 2008, pp 1-10, p 2

⁴¹ Westmoreland, op. cit, p 4

gathering of testimonies) and negotiate the division through which they attempt to remove the distance and be/come closer to homeland.