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Writing Cross-Cultural Histories Through the Eyes of a Traveler A History of the Frank Neighbourhood in İzmir

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PS06 Fiction, Poetry and Memoir as Architectural (Hi)story-Telling

Jilly Traganou, Parsons School of Design | The New School, USA, Chair

Writing Cross-Cultural Histories Through the Eyes of a Traveler: A History of the Frank Neighbourhood in Izmir

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the micro-history of the development of the Frank Neighborhood, a residential quarter built for upper-class European migrants in the 19th century port city of Izmir. It introduces an unconventional academic writing method that aims to convey research to both academic and wider audiences simultaneously. The paper discusses the merits of writing architectural histories in a semi-fictional narrative form that is based on studying networks, together with data and information embedded in postcards, photographs, Orientalist accounts, and memoirs of inhabitants.

In this writing method, the author uses a traveler as a storyteller, setting an unusual tone for a scholarly piece of work. The traveler is a fictional character that blends multiple travelers, including Orientalists and the author of Turkish origin herself. This approach expands the limits and limitations of research by not only retrieving embedded knowledge from archival materials and grey sources; but also by blending embodied knowledge derived from the author's personal cruise trip to Europe. Striving to liberate information and knowledge from distorted realities, the paper also invites rethinking on positionality.

The paper tells a story through the eyes of a traveler, scene by scene, inviting readers to be immersed in a tale about exploring the interrelations between global and local developments, public and private spheres, and worldwide companies (e.g., the East India Company) and immigrant family ties (Dussaud, Guiffroy, and Giraud Families of Izmir) and the development of infrastructures. It also connects to spaces that are part of present-day inhabitants' daily life by reviving their memories, thereby encourages writers and authors to pen other stories. The evocative nature of storytelling and architectural history is used to draw attention to weaving research into personal stories, aiming to enhance the historiographical toolbox with a creative writing method towards more multi-vocal and inclusive history of architecture.