

Editors' Introduction

This special issue on social memory in Turkey owes its conception to a workshop organized by the Sociology Department of Boğaziçi University in April 2003. The aim of the workshop, entitled "The Politics of Remembering," was to present and discuss various questions concerning "remembering" in Turkey, a country that is generally accused, even in its own public opinion, of social and political amnesia. A group of academics, including graduate students and independent researchers, who work on issues of memory joined the workshop and raised sensitive issues ranging from secret stories pertaining to the construction of Turkish national identity to the politics of identity and belonging in the case of Kurdish, Greek, Jewish and Armenian communities in Turkey.¹ The keynote speech by Andreas Huyssen, an important contemporary theorist of social memory, contributed to putting local questions into a broader perspective that dealt with intertwined practices of memory.² The workshop was small and not exhaustive; yet, the richness of the accounts and the variety of lively questions showed that Turkey does not simply lack memories, but that there are much more subtle politics involved in their articulation and visibility in public life. Our aim in preparing this special issue has been to address these mostly invisible and understudied questions. While some papers were re-written for publication here, others could unfortunately not be included due to various practical reasons.

As most students of social memory know, there is a proliferation of research and literature on social or collective memory in the contemporary

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- 1 The papers presented in the workshop included the following: Andreas Huyssen, *Diaspora and Nation: Constellations of Memory Among Turks and Germans*; Biray Kolluoğlu Kırılı, *When Does the Nation Remember?*; Meltem Ahıska, *The Destruction of Archives in Turkey: History, Memory and Politics*; Ferhunde Özbay, *Home Life and Family Ideology: The Role of Peasant Girls and War Orphans in the Construction of National Family*; Nükhet Sirman, *Constituting the Narrating Subject*; Leyla Neyzi, *The Politics of Memory in Turkey: Locating the Life Story Narrative between National History, Collective Memory and Bodily Recall*; Rifat Bali, *Politics of Memory Manipulations*; Nadire Mater, *We don't talk about this: Remembering/Forgetting the War*; Ayşe Öncü, *The Production of "Easternness" for Mass Consumption in "Global Istanbul"*; Nazan Üstündağ, *Remembering the Village in the Life Stories of Displaced Kurdish Women*; Arzu Öztürkmen, *From Tripolis to Tirebolu: Memory and History in a Turkish Black Sea Town*; Nergis Canefe, *Lost Cities/Lost Identities: Memories of Urbanity in the Eastern Mediterranean-The Case of Izmir*; Melissa Bilal, *Grandma, Can You Sing Me a Lullaby Again?: Researching Your Own Memory*; Doğuş Derya, *Turkish Cypriot Official Historiography and the Politics of Remembering in North Cyprus*; Elif Babül, *Claiming a Place through Memories of Belonging*.
 - 2 Published as: Andreas Huyssen, "Diaspora and Nation: Migration into Other Pasts," *New German Critique*, no. 88 (Winter 2003).

world. This is a rather recent development.³ Memory studies have been established in the academia in many countries, and the concept of memory appears in many publications attending to various contemporary national, local, or trans-national issues, not only in Europe and North America, but also in post-colonial contexts in other continents. Perhaps we could name these developments the “memorial turn” in the social sciences. Memory has become such a fashionable subject in today’s world; however, many scholars would argue that the interest in memory is in fact a symptom of its destruction as part of social or communal life. Whether we agree with Pierre Nora who contrasts the once existent *environment* of memory to the particularized *sites* of memory in today’s societies,⁴ or whether we refuse to believe in Nora’s claim of a homogeneous origin of memory, it is nevertheless possible to argue that memory as a research subject appears with a diagnosed absence of social memory in everyday life. It is this sense of an absence or lack that triggers the modern search for memory.

Nükhet Sirman, in her article in this issue, points to this “power of lack” in the transmission of life stories (of middle class women born in the first decades of the Turkish republic) constructed in relation to the grand narrative of the nation. Her methodological discussion of what gets transmitted in oral history from the interviewee to the interviewer shows that not the content holds significance, but rather the load of emotions that are based on a desire for an impossible attachment. The emotions destabilize the transmission, and the crisis of national belonging is thus further recreated by the act of listening to these women’s memories. The crisis of national belonging that Sirman talks about is very much informed by the economic, social, and political processes of globalization. The nation’s role in accommodating belonging has usually been weakened whenever nation-states perform mostly as regulative and military actors. Ethnic and religious identities hitherto excluded from the nation’s sense of the past now reappear, reproducing past conflicts in new terms, sometimes enveloped in the discourses of multiculturalism and diaspora. Yet, when considered from a critical perspective, memory accounts of ethnic and religious minorities in Turkey also evoke loss and margins of identity, rather than offering sturdy alternatives to the present crisis. Melissa Bilal argues in her article on lost

3 For example, Klein reminds us that in 1964 the Dictionary of Social Sciences declared that the concept of memory was on the verge of extinction. The first edition of Raymond Williams’ *Keywords*, published in 1976 and known to be a comprehensive mapping of the language of the social sciences, did not include memory. Kerwin Lee Klein, “On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse,” *Representations*, no. 69 (Winter 2000): 131, Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana, 1976).

4 Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux De Memoire*,” *Representations*, no. 26 (Spring 1989).

lullabies that displacement and loss are two interrelated experiences that shape the sense of being an Armenian in Turkey today. The “lost lullaby” of the Armenian grandmother is taken by her as a marginal vantage point from which to decipher the dominant cultural politics of Turkey. Similarly, memory practices of *Rums* from Imbros, who had to leave the island in the 1960s and 1970s due to hostile state policies, produce a marginal position. As discussed by Elif Babül, they reveal tensions created by opposing different forms of belonging to legal claims of citizenship. The multi-sited ethnography of memory that Arzu Öztürkmen has undertaken is a survey of material traces and relics and, thus, a genealogy of a sense of otherness and identity through the Tirebolites/Tripolitians’ accounts of the movements of displacement at the beginning of the twentieth century. It becomes the self-conscious task of the ethnographer to bring together fragmented and dispersed traces to produce a narrative of this and other historical events. In this context, memories point to traces rather than give life to the lost unity. Meltem Ahıska’s discussion of the “missing archives” in Turkey points to the significance of the archive as a trace that stands between singularity and generality, between memory and history. Although raising different issues and employing different perspectives and methods, these articles of this compilation overall share a concern for reflecting on the fragments, rather than for a restorative nostalgia in the sense of Boym’s words.⁵ Furthermore, they politically endorse what Banarjee suggests: the task of remembering is not to “mobilize the past for the present,” but rather to remember “the unfinished nature of the past.”⁶ Memories are far from having the restorative power to fully correct either the failures of history writing or existing social problems. Accounts of memory are fragmented and often evoke loss. They are mostly subjective and shaped within the present. Nevertheless, we argue that accounts on and discussions of memory have a significant potential to elucidate the present crisis.

In addition to the increasing urgency of memory-work, reflections on memory enable us to consider the present crisis in modern temporality. The temporal matrix of the modern world is marked by simultaneous processes of opening up the past as well as the future or, in other words, by the rupture that set the present apart from the past and also has implication for the future. The so-called acceleration of time that has both haunted and excited modern women and men for centuries is actually a process whereby the distance between the past and the present is widening at an

5 Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

6 Cited by Partha Chatterjee, “Introduction,” in *History and the Present*, ed. Partha Chatterjee and Anjan Ghosh (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002), 23.

ever-increasing speed. The fracture in this alignment between past, present and future seems to be triggering the late-twentieth-century memory boom and, hence, incites us to re-think the present in relation to past occurrences of excess, yet damaged and transformed memory.

In Benjamin's words, the final spark of destruction can be illuminating to assess the value of what is lost and what is yet to come. Memory, in this sense, is significant because of its political implications. Memory is not as rosy a subject as some would like to think. Against the current of an industry of nostalgia, memory studies mostly focus on trauma and suffering. Memory studies deal with exclusions, injustices, disappearances, genocides, and wars. The field problematizes the meaning of living together in a human society, by making references to past problems and promises, otherwise masked in the impersonalized and instrumentalist discourses of capitalist society. In this very structure, while some memories are privileged, others are left to perish. Hence, the need for a politics of remembering to take on the memory-work; to talk not only about what we know, but also about the unknown, the displaced, and the silenced; not only about ourselves, but also of others; not only about the past, but also of the possibilities of the future. We hope that this special issue will contribute to new perspectives on confronting questions of memory in a society, which we unfortunately believe to be without memory.

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