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Esra Özyürek, ed. *The Politics of Public Memory in Turkey.* Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006. x + 225 pp. $24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8156-3131-6.

Reviewed by Leyla Neyzi
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Better Late Than Never: Modern Turkey Remembers its Past

The Politics of Public Memory in Turkey, edited by Esra Özyürek, an associate professor in the Department of Anthropology at the University of California San Diego, has its origins in a book in Turkish edited by Özyürek in 2001. Another related book, *Nostalgia for the Modern: State Secularism and Everyday Politics in Turkey,* based on Özyürek's dissertation, was published in 2006. Taken together, these books make an important contribution to the previously scant literature on memory in Turkey. Until the 1980s, there was little interest in the public sphere in history and memory in Turkey, where history was understood to stand for national/official history, and personal and communal memory, in so far as they diverged from history with a capital H, were relegated to the relative safety of the home or were even silenced therein.[1] Rejecting the Ottoman past, despite the fact that most of its cadres emerged from among the Committee of Union and Progress that turned everyday life in Anatolia into tragedy during World War I, the new Turkish Republic focused on the future in its attempts to achieve modernity.[2] The interdisciplinary literature on memory was only recently discovered by young critical scholars studying abroad in the last decades. This coincided with a slow but gradual democratization of Turkish society and the beginnings of a debate on history and memory in the public sphere.[3]

Eighty-five years after the founding of the Turkish Republic, the legacy of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938), the hero of the Turkish War of Independence and the country's first president, is beginning to be discussed in the public sphere in a highly emotional debate. As a result, a number of recent historical events and issues have come out of the closet. These include intercommunal violence between Turks and Armenians, the transfer of the Armenian population from Anatolia by the Ottoman state in 1915 (*tehcir*), and the ensuing mass destruction of the Armenian population; the Greco-Turkish War, followed by intercommunal violence and the forced exchange of populations in 1923; the process of construction of Turkish national identity, secularization, and state administration of the Islamic religion; and the status, treatment, and experience of minorities under the Turkish Republic (Kurds, Alevis, Armenians, Greek-Orthodox, Jews, Assyrians, and Yezidis, among others), including Kurdish uprisings, transfer of populations and violence, the separate conscription and unequal taxation of non-Muslims during World War II, attacks on non-Muslims instigated by the state in Edirne in the 1930s and in Istanbul in 1955, and the forced expulsion of Greeks in 1964. Most recently, the conflict between the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Turkish army since the 1980s led to large-scale forced transfer of populations and an exponential rise in violence, including the disappearance and deaths of civilians, guerillas, and military personnel.[4] Unfortunately, the superficial and manipulative use of these issues in international politics and the global media only solidify the defensive attitude of representatives of the Turkish state, making it more difficult to institutionalize democracy and open channels of communication among diverse groups within society. It is in the current context of categorical black-and-white thinking and a highly polarized debate concerning identity that there is greater need than ever for nuanced academic analyses of history and memory in Turkey.

Özyürek's recent work contextualizes current debates in Turkey within the wider literature on the subject. In her brief editor's introduction to *Politics of Public Memory in Turkey*, Özyürek refers, in particular, to the modernist vision of Kemalism, which is being debated four generations later. Kemalism refers to the ideology of Atatürk, the cult leader of modern Turkey. According to this vision, Turkey would be a modern republic, which necessitated the creation of a new national identity and a distinct rupture with the Ottoman Empire. Confirming

that the peoples of Turkey are finally remembering their history, she suggests that the past is used by individuals and groups in the present to express their identities and further their diverse cultural and political projects. An important aspect of memory discussed by Özyürek is commodification through the heritage and nostalgia industries, as in the case of the marketing of symbols of the past and of the city of Istanbul itself since the 1990s.

Politics of Public Memory in Turkey consists of seven essays, four of which were included in an earlier form in the book edited by Özyürek in 2001 (essays by Aslı Gür, Nazlı Ökten, Cihan Tuğal, and Aslı Iğsız). In a new contribution for this volume, Kimberly Hart suggests, in "Weaving Modernity, Commercializing Carpets: Collective Memory and Contested Tradition in Örselli Village," that rug-weaving villagers in Turkey embrace modernity and national identity while producing commodities, which, ironically, represent "tradition" for the urban middle class. Hart argues that the people of Turkey, at least in the rural West, culturally embrace a practical present- and future-oriented vision, supporting through their agency the rapid socioeconomic transformation of the country.

Gür's article, "Stories in Three Dimensions: Narratives of the Nation and the Anatolian Civilizations Museum," is based on a study that asked whether official representations of the past in the Anatolian Civilizations Museum in Ankara were meaningful to ordinary people. Gür argues that while the Turkish state used archaeology to represent official history in the museum, the degree to which patrons of the museum identified with this narrative varied by class (specifically, education and urban/rural status). The focus on representation in museums is important: since 1990, another indicator of the new interest in the past has been the establishment of a number of privately funded museums. Of particular importance for the present would be a study that compares the representational strategies of privately funded museums with those of the older, state-funded museums.

Another look at archaeology is found in Ayfer Bartu Candan's contribution, "Remembering a Nine-Thousand-Year-Old Site: Presenting Çatalhöyük." Analyzing the way the heritage site Çatalhöyük in central Anatolia is represented by the Turkish state, archaeologists, villagers, New Age groups, artists, and producers of artifacts for tourism, Candan suggests that it is the unequal power relations among these diverse groups that influence the persuasiveness of different narratives of the site in the present.

In "An Endless Death and an Eternal Mourning: November 10 in Turkey," Ökten focuses on the commemoration of the death of Atatürk since November 10, 1938. Based on interviews with citizens who remember him, she argues that the sacralization of Atatürk and continual mourning have made it difficult for Turkish society to freely debate the past. While Ökten suggests that middle-class citizens have largely internalized official narratives about Atatürk, the possible discontinuities and contradictions within life story narratives of elites, changes in these narratives over time, and comparison of these narratives with those of other groups in society may raise new questions about the remembering/commemoration of Atatürk in Turkey.

In "Public Memory as Political Battleground: Islamist Subversions of Republican Nostalgia," Özyürek shows how the Islamist media differently represents the 1920s in line with their contemporary vision and political aim of providing an alternative–though equally homogeneous and dominant–narrative to that of the secularist narrative. In addition to showing different readings of the same past, this essay suggests that despite their seeming polarization, the secularist and Islamist elites resemble one another in their refusal to accept alternative visions of society, including alternative histories of the nation.

In "Memories of Violence: The 1915 Massacres and the Construction of Armenian Identity," Tuğal uses Armenian memoirs to comment on the construction of Armenian history and identity by the Armenian diaspora. Tuğal suggests that autobiographies contain internal contradictions not found in nationalist narratives, which point to the complex relations of Anatolian Armenians and Turks who shared everyday life and a history in their homeland for generations before nationalism and international intervention led to unprecedented violence. Underscoring the difference between history and memory, Tuğal argues that sense memory may represent the irrationality and meaningless of violence.

In "Polyphony and Geographic Kinship in Anatolia: Framing the Turkish-Greek Compulsory Population Exchange," Iğsız focuses on the recent nostalgia about the forced population exchange between Greece and Turkey in 1923. Focusing on such cultural products as books and music, she argues that it is the shared spatial identity between Turks and Greeks that is emphasized by those attempting to surpass the polarization based on national identity. Like Özyürek, Iğsız reminds us that the study of memory must also treat nostalgia, heritage, and the commodification of memory by the culture industry. What is particularly ironic in the Turkish case is that these products for sale in the capitalist marketplace may be simulta-

neously deemed "dangerous," resulting in various forms of censorship, where the distribution of particular products may be prohibited and their producers taken to court and sentenced.

The most important contribution of this volume is that it introduces contemporary debates on history and memory in Turkey and the voices of a new generation of critical young scholars to an international audience. While recent historical events and issues in the late Ottoman and early republican period have been treated by historians and political scientists, the view from memory studies is significant. The book touches on some of the main events and issues currently debated in Turkey, including the history and memory of 1915, the legacy of Atatürk, including modernity and secularism, and the representation of history through cultural means, such as archaeology, museums, books, and music. However, in its focus on representation, the book gives short shrift to individual and communal experience as expressed in oral history narratives. While the essays contribute to understanding the Turkish context, Tuğal's study is the only one that uses the Turkish case to make a theoretical contribution to the literature on memory. Given that earlier work which focused on the opposition between history and memory is giving way to an appreciation of their interpenetration in a new interdisciplinary field, Tuğal's distinction between history and memory may not be terribly useful. However, his focus on the contradictions in autobiographical narratives and on sense memory complicates an era and event that have been excessively politicized and oversimplified in the literature.

It is unfortunate that the book lacks a conclusion; it would have been useful to discuss future directions for memory work in Turkey at a time when the field is rapidly expanding. Nevertheless, *Politics of Public Memory in Turkey* is a pioneering work that opens the way for new interdisciplinary and comparative research on Turkey that will contribute to the theoretical and methodological literature on memory.

Notes

[1]. For an example of such silences, see Leyla Neyzi, "Remembering to Forget: Sabbateanism, National Identity and Subjectivity in Turkey," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 44, no. 1 (January 2002): 137-158.

[2]. Sibel Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba, eds., *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997).

[3]. See the recent special issue on memory in *New Perspectives in Turkey* 34 (Spring 2006).

[4]. See Hans-Lukas Kieser, ed., *Turkey beyond Nationalism: Towards Post-Nationalist Identities* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006).

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