Remembering the Turkish Military Coup d'Etat of 12 September 1980: a comparison between the memories of revolutionaries in exile and of those who stayed.

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Abbreviations

ATİF: Almanya Türkiyeli İşçiler Federasyonu (Federation of Workers from Turkey-Germany)
ATİK: Avrupa Türkiyeli İşçiler Konfederasyonu (Confederation of Workers from Turkey - Europe)
ANAP: Anavatan Partisi (Motherland Party)
AP: Adalet Partisi (Justice Party)
CHP: Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party - RPP)
Dev-Genç: Devrimci Gençlik (Revolutionary Youth)
DEV-SOL: Devrimci Sol (Revolutionary Left)
DEV-YOL: Devrimci Yol (Revolutionary Path)
DGDF: Devrimci Gençlik Dernekleri Federasyonu (Federation of Revolutionary Youth Organizations)
DİDF: Demokratik İçi Dernekleri Federasyonu (Democratic Workers’ Organizations)
DİSK: Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu (Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions)
DP: Demokrat Parti (Democrat Party)
FKF: Fikir Kulüpleri Federasyonu (Federation of Thought Clups)
IMF: International Money Fund
ISAs: Ideological State Apparatuses
KSD: Kurtuluş Sosyalist Dergi (Journal of Socialist Lieration)
MDD: Milli Demokratik Devrim (National Democratic Revolution)
MDP: Milliyetçi Demokrasi Partisi (Party of Nationalist Democracy)
MGK: Milli Güvenlik Konseyi (National Security Council – NSC)
MHP: Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Action Party – NAP)
MİŞK: Milliyetçi İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu (Confederation of Nationalist Workers’ Unions)
MLSPB: Marksist Leninist Silahlı Propaganda Birliği (Marxist Leninist Armed Propaganda Unity)
MSP: Milli Selamet Partisi (National Salvation Party).
MTTB: Milli Türk Talebe Birliği Union of Turkish Nationalist Students
NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PDA: Proleter Devrimci Aydınlık
RSAs: Repressive State Apparatuses
SGB: Sosyalist Gençlik Birliği (The Unity of Socialist Youth)
TDİG: Türkiye Demokratik İşçi Gençlik Derneği (Democratic Workers' and Youth Organization of Turkey)
TDKP-İÖ: TDKP – İnşa Örgütü (Construction Organization)
TDKP: Türkiye Devrimci Komünist Partisi (Revolutionary Communist Party Turkey)
THKO: Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Ordusu (People's Liberation Army of Turkey)
THKO-GMK: THKO-Geçici Merkez Komitesi (Temporary Head Committee)
THKO-MB: THKO-Mücadele Birliği (Unity of Struggle)
THKO-TDY: THKO-Türkiye Devriminin Yolu (Revolutionary Path of Turkey)
THKP-C: Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Parti-Cephesi (People's Liberation Party-Front of Turkey)
THKP-C ÜY: THKP-C Üçüncü Yollar (Third Road)
TİİKP: Türkiye İhtilalci İşçi Köylü Partisi (Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Party of Turkey)
TİKP: Türkiye İşçi Köylü Partisi (Workers' and Peasants' Party Turkey)
TİP: Türkiye İşçi Partisi (Workers' Party of Turkey)
TİSK: Türkiye İşveren Sendikaları Konfederasyonu (Confederation of Employers' Union Turkey)
TKP/ML: Türkiye Komünist Partisi/Marksist Leninist (Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist Leninist)
TKP/ML-DHB: Türkiye Komünist Partisi/Marksist Leninist Devrimci Halkın Birliği (Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist Leninist The Unity of Revolutionary People)
TKP/ML-HB: Türkiye Komünist Partisi/Marksist Leninist – Halkın Birliği (Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist Leninist – The Unity of the People)
TKP/ML: Hareketi Halkın Birliği: Türkiye Komünist Partisi/Marksist Leninist Hareketi Halkın Birliği (Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist Leninist Movement The Unity of the People)
TKP/ML Partizan: Türkiye Komünist Partisi/Marksist Leninist Partisan (Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist Leninist Partisan)
TKP/ML-YİÖ: Türkiye Komünist Partisi/Marksist Leninist – Yeniden İnşa Örgütü (Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist Leninist - Reconstruction Organization)
TKP: Türkiye Komünist Partisi (Communist Party of Turkey)
TKP/ML: Türkiye Komünist Partisi/Marksist Leninist (Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist Leninist)
TOBB: Türkiye Odalar ve Borsalar Birliği (The Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey)
TÖB-DER: Türkiye Öğretmenler Birleşme ve Dayanışma Derneği (Organization of Teachers’ Union and Solidarity Turkey)
TRT: Türkiye Radyo ve Televizyon Kurumu (Institution of Turkish Radio and Television)
TÜDAY: Türkiye Almanya İnsan Hakları Özgürlüğü (Human Rights Organization Turkey/Germany)
TÜRK-İŞ: Türkiye İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu (The Confederation of Trade Unions)
TÜSİAD: Türkiye Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği (Organization of Turkish Industrialists and Businessman)
US: United States
VP: Vatan Partisi (Homeland Party)
WB: World Bank (Dünya Bankası)
YDGDF: Yurtsever Devrimci Gençlik Dernekleri Federasyonu (Federation of Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Organizations)
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Abstract in English

This study aims at understanding the dynamics and characteristics of the ways revolutionaries remember the 12 September 1980 military coup d’état in Turkey. It analyses the reconstruction of collective memory through the lens of the chief theoretical accounts by Maurice Halbwachs and Louis Althusser. For a better understanding of remembering the past of the coup d’état and the role of present conditions in the reconstruction of the past, the study adopts a comparative perspective: the subjects are revolutionaries in Turkey and revolutionaries who went into exile in Germany. Through ethnographic participant observation of commemorative practices and biographical narrative interviews with revolutionaries, the study explores the effects of political, economic and cultural conditions on the processes of reconstructing the past. It finds that biographies are not merely individual accounts, but products of the social frameworks they are embedded in. The analysis of the biographical narratives and commemorative practices results in a conceptualization of the main characteristics of remembering the 12 September.

Abstract in German*


* I am grateful to Assoc. Prof. Can Aybek who kindly accepted to translate the abstract to German.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 2005, I visited my father in hospital in our hometown in eastern Turkey. As I had been informed previous to my visit, he was suffering from serious health problems which we had not known of before. I wanted to stay with him at the hospital in the evening as his attendant. This was definitely not the first time we had had the chance to have a ‘dad-daughter’ talk. Nevertheless, this was a different situation because of the place where we were. There was nothing to interrupt our conversation in the room; no television, no computer, no third persons. Suddenly, my father started to talk about the good old days, when he was young and fighting for revolution. Since my childhood, although I do not remember exactly since when, I had known that my father had been engaged in the revolutionary movement of the ‘70s, and hence the members of our family had suffered much from political violence due to his activities. The earliest picture that I can recall from my childhood about those days is a memory of two soldiers asking me where my father was and myself immediately hiding behind the curtains. I remember the fear I felt, but I am not sure if this is really a memory of mine or whether someone else told me the story. Subsequently, I learned from the family about our ‘enemies,’ and gained some idea of why we hated them, but the story of my father’s involvement in the revolutionary movement, his imprisonment, and my mother’s experiences while her husband was incarcerated always remained unspoken. We – my sister, my brother and I – knew it would open wounds and make them bleed again and never dared to ask either my father or any other relative about our family’s past. There was an unspoken ‘agreement’ to keep silence about the past in the family. Or was it our parents who were unwilling to ‘remember’ or to tell us?

In our talk in the hospital room, which took place 25 years after the military coup, my father broke our family’s ‘agreement’ about silence. The more he told me of his story, about his comrades and their activities and thoughts, the more curious I became about the whole story. He told me about friends of his who were executed, who were shot, who had to leave the country, and later he told me where and how he was tortured. This previously unspoken story about the past was incredibly alive, with images, sounds, smells, pains and joys. As he told it, my father described each event, each person, each place in detail. ‘Do you know X theatre on Y street? Before, its name was Z. There we
had a meeting about topic A in the afternoon at about 13 pm. There was a man standing at the back of the room with a grey coat.’ ‘I started to run down to X street and turned into a green two-floored house, and rang the bell of the wooden door next to it...’ ‘At night they took me out of X place, cops on both sides. We were walking along the street where the bus stops are today...’ I knew all the streets, places, and some of the people he was talking about. Besides the very complex set of emotions I had that evening, I was trying to understand how it had been possible for my father to continue living in this small town, passing through the same streets, the places where he and his friends had been imprisoned, tortured or killed. Did he ever happen to meet the perpetrators afterwards – the soldiers, police officers or doctors who refused to report the marks of torture on his body? What happened to the revolutionaries – my father was not the only one: himself, his friends, revolutionaries in other towns, in big cities, exiles in other countries? But the most important question was how could society deal with the past of 12 September 1980, how did it recover from such a trauma? Had the pains healed? What is the social attitude towards the memory of 12 September? Is it denial? Is there another ‘agreement on silence’ that we as members of society unconsciously signed? Have we forgotten? Has anything remained? Can we confront the past of the military coup or do we still have the fear of re-opening our wounds and making them bleed?

My interest in the memory of 12 September, which started with personal concerns, turned into an academic interest in social and political structures of remembering. As Jeffrey Olick writes, I am well aware of the fact that ‘family history and personal preoccupations do not suffice for a worthy dissertation topic’ (2008; 23). Family history and personal preoccupations can arouse an interest in understanding a social fact, but one must move beyond personal interests (which does not necessarily mean excluding the personal from the scientific) in order to exhaustively explore that social fact.

This study, therefore, is designed to understand memory as social reconstruction: to understand social frameworks of remembering the past and biographical narratives as products of society. Based on these thoughts, the key concepts of this study – memory, collectivity, biography – are generated. In the following sections I discuss these key concepts in detail. The purpose of this chapter is to provide some necessary background, set out the research questions and introduce the research design, and give an overview of this thesis.
I.I Background to the Problem

The revolutionary movement arose during the financial and political crisis Turkey had to face in the ‘70s. Governments were in trouble with the economic problems generated by the international oil crisis of 1973, the subsequent high inflation rates (Zürcher 2004), and a structural crisis resulting from the accumulation of capital since World War II (Ozan 2012). A new economic plan was unveiled on 24 January 1980 – the 24th January Stabilization Programme. It aimed at a structural change in the economy: a shift from import substitution industrialization to export-oriented industrialization and a free-market economy (Savran 2003). However, these measures could not be put into practice before the military coup due to political ambivalences and trade union opposition. On 12 September 1980, the military overthrew the government and declared a junta regime. Soon after the declaration of martial law throughout the country, political parties and organisations and trade unions were closed. Many militant members and sympathizers of political organizations (including right-wing and nationalist organizations) were arrested, tortured, executed or forced to leave the country. Although the junta regime only lasted until the establishment of civil government in 1983, the constitution of 1982 and the junta’s institutions are still operative. Moreover, the junta generals and other perpetrators of the junta’s crimes were not taken to court or punished until a change in the law in 2010.

12 September 1980 was one of the milestones in the modern history of Turkey. The military coup d’etat was not only an intervention in the democratic system; it was an event which radically transformed the country’s economic, cultural and political life. While adopting neo-liberal economic politics, the junta institutions oppressed cultural and social life (Gürbilek 2009). Thus, besides the armed forces (military, police and counter-guerrilla groups) violating the human rights of the junta’s opponents, particularly revolutionaries, the institutions of the junta regime violated basic rights. Political party and trade union activities, higher education, TV Broadcasting and publishing were all under the control of these institutions. Banning and censoring became everyday activities. With the military coup, the State Apparatus was able to exercise its power over society by using the Repressive Apparatuses to restructure the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs).

The structural changes which appeared in Turkish society after the military coup have inevitably aroused the interest of academics of various disciplines, foremost of all political economists (whose analyses focus on the neo-liberal transformation after 12
September, and the cooperation of national and global organizations during this transformation and its effects on the proletariat and trade unions), but also researchers in the fields of cultural studies and media studies. In addition to interest in the transformation of political, economic and cultural life, some researchers are interested in the civil movements generated after the 1980s. New models of civil movements, with demands regarding identity and gender politics, were generated due to the oppression of the left during and after the coup d’etat. Prominent among these are the Kurdish national struggle (Başkaya 2012) and feminism (Bora and Günal 2002, Tekeli 1990).

The majority of studies on the 12 September, however, focus on analyses of general structures at the macro level, whereas the experiences of the actors remain in the field of memoirs, autobiographies, or fiction. Nevertheless, biographies are not only individual life stories but they are ‘products’ of society, and hence necessarily reflect the general structures it is produced by. ‘Biographies make it possible to combine history, society and individual processes of meaning’ (Mills 1959, quoted in Kupferberg 2012). This study, therefore, aims to fill the gap between actors and social structures by analyzing biographies as reconstructions of changing political, economic and historical conditions.

One problem lies in the conceptualization and use of the term collective memory. Mithat Sancar, in his recent book on confrontation with the past, emphasizes the difficulty of conceptualization (as well as the translation of the concepts of memory into Turkish), particularly in terms of confrontation with difficult pasts (2007, 25-35). A similar argument could be applied to the term ‘collective memory’. In practice, the term is used in Turkey to substitute or to ascribe ‘static’ historical and/or social characteristics to the past. However, Maurice Halbwachs (1992 [1925]), who used and developed the term ‘collective memory’ argues that the dynamic process of reconstructing the past depends on present thoughts, necessities, beliefs and conditions. Collective memory is principally ‘a process and not a thing, a faculty rather than a place’ (Olick 2008: 159).

This study seeks to understand the dynamic process of reconstructing the past as conceived by Halbwachs, by focusing on revolutionaries who experienced the ‘same’ past. To investigate the effects of present conditions on the process of reconstructing the past of 12 September, a comparative approach is employed. By comparing the narratives and mnemonic practices of exiles living in Germany and revolutionaries residing in Turkey, the study demonstrates the role of the interaction of past experiences with present conditions in reconstructing the past.
Halbwachs’ theory of collective memory not only emphasizes the effect of present conditions on forming the past, but he also highlights the role of shifting social frameworks in reconstructing memory. Thus, he takes memory out of the individual field – of the subjective mind – and places it in the social field – of collective consciousness. He writes that ‘it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories’ (Halbwachs 1992; 38). Accordingly, social frameworks (family, religion, education, etc.) along with material frameworks – time and space – reconstruct the perception and memory of the past over and again. Halbwachs’ emphasis on social frameworks of memory is crucial to the theoretical and methodological approaches adopted in this study. I argue that there are similarities between Halbwachs’ theory of collective memory, as it is structured by external social relations, and Louis Althusser’s (1971) discussion of ideology. Althusser contributes to the Marxist concept of State Apparatuses (which are understood as the repressive apparatus that operates to the profit of the bourgeoisie by dominating the lower classes) with his analyses of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). He thus examines some institutions that function as ISAs, such as religious, educational and family ones. ISAs, in his opinion, function together with the repressive state apparatus to oppress lower classes by structuring the ‘collective consciousness.’ In other words they are the tools for ‘imposing’ the ideology of the ruling class.

From the methodological point of view, to analyze the structures of ‘collective consciousness’ and the effects of social frameworks on memory, ethnographic participant observation is used in this study together with biographical narrative interviews. Analysis of commemorative practices is decisive in the understanding of meaning-making processes, and thus the collective element embedded in life stories. The study is of significance to the method of biographical research, as it contributes to its current use in memory studies by stressing and empirically elaborating its coherence for the analysis of collective memory. The study shows that the dynamic structure of the collective memory, as conceived by Halbwachs, can be analyzed using biographical case reconstruction (Rosenthal 1993; 2004; 2006), which stresses the two main characteristics of life stories; life as it is experienced (erlebte Lebensgeschichte) and life as it is narrated (erzählte Lebensgeschichte). I discuss the biographical case reconstruction method – its basic analytical steps and its features which overlap with the theory of collective memory – in detail in the methodology chapter. However, for a
better understanding of my focus on the analysis of life histories and life stories in this study, I shall first turn to the research questions and the design of the study.

I.II Research Design and the Research Questions
Collective memory is ‘far from monolithic’ (Olick 2008; 159); it is diverse and multiple (Schittenhelm 1999). Depending on their historical conditions, groups experience the past differently. In the case of the structural changes that appeared in society after the military coup in Turkey, it is to be expected that every single group, irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity, religion or class etc., was subject to these radical changes to various extents. Hence, it is assumed that not only the opposing groups (left- and right-wing political groups, the proletariat and capitalists, victims and perpetrators, women and men, ethnic/religious minorities and Turks/Muslims) but also the revolutionary groups have experienced the past of the 12 September in various ways. The study primarily focuses on the past of the 12 September as it is experienced, remembered and narrated by the revolutionary groups. To understand the effect of present conditions on memory it is necessary to make a comparison between (at least) two groups who experienced the same past as members of the same group, but have different surroundings in the present. I therefore chose to conduct the research with political exiles living in Germany and revolutionaries still residing in Turkey. The main criteria for sampling the groups were having been involved in the revolutionary movement during the ‘70s in Turkey and being engaged in a political organization or an NGO in the present. Factors other than these two criteria, such as ethnic, religious, or occupational differences were not considered. However, I was careful to interview revolutionaries from the same age group, and to have an equal number of men and women interviewees. As mentioned previously, the biographical narrative interview method (Schütze 1976, 1983) was used for the life stories, in addition to participant observation and expert interviews. Practices to commemorate 12 September in Turkey and Germany were observed and analyzed to understand the collective embedded in the biographical narratives, and to identify the present ‘collective consciousness’ through which the collective memory of the revolutionaries is reconstructed.
Issues regarding the sampling criteria and the methods of data collection and analysis are further discussed in the methodology chapter. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning here once again that the variety of revolutionary groups in Turkey and Germany
generates the question of representation. To overcome this problem, I look for two basic criteria for the selection of organizations and events. Commemorative events are organized by federations or platforms which are constituted by various groups. I participated in events in Germany organized by the ATİK (Avrupa Türküyeli İşçiler Konfederasyonu – the Confederation of Workers from Turkey – Europe), the DİDF (Demokratik İşçi Dernekleri Federasyonu – the Federation of Democratic Worker Organizations), and the TÜDAY (the Human Rights Organization Turkey/Germany – Menschenrechtsverein Türkei/Deutschland). In Turkey I witnessed events held by the Federation of Revolutionary ‘78s (Devrimci 78'liler Federasyonu) and the Human Rights Organization (İnsan Hakları Derneği – İHD). The strategy of participating in events organized by ‘umbrella organizations’ provided observations of various left-wing organizations, although even these organizations are identified with certain groups. The structure and content of the events – conferences, panels etc. – are not subject to the analyses of commemorative practices, even though I followed these sorts of activities in order to support my arguments concerning the political and historical conditions of collective memory. Above all, since the research aims to analyze the relation between life stories and the collective consciousness and practices in which the biographies are reconstructed, events by the organizations that the interviewees were engaged in were of particular interest. Between 2009 and 2013 I conducted 19 biographical narrative interviews (ten in Germany and nine in Turkey), four expert interviews, and participated in tens of commemorative events.

**Research Questions**

The research questions of the study can be classified according to three basic topics of the research: those regarding the reconstruction of the collective memory (dialectical relation between past experiences and present social frameworks); those concerning how revolutionaries narrate their past experiences; and lastly those regarding the relation between the collective and the individual, hence relating to the features corresponding between the commemorations and the biographical narratives. The questions are as follows:
I. How is the collective memory of 12 September being reconstructed by the revolutionary groups?

- What kinds of similarities/differences exist between the processes of reconstructing the past by exiles and revolutionaries residing in Turkey? Hence, what is the role of present conditions in collective memory?
- How do recent political upheavals affect the memory of 12 September?
- What are the essential characteristics of the memory of 12 September and how are they being reconstructed and practised in and through mnemonic practices, memory places and mnemonic tools?

II. How are past experiences narrated in the life stories of the revolutionaries?

- How and to what extent are political, economic and cultural changes and events being remembered by the revolutionaries?
- What are the main differences/similarities between the structures of the life stories (topics, turning points, text types)?
- How are the revolutionary movement, the coup, imprisonment, physical and psychological violence, loss of a loved one and becoming an exile narrated?

III. What are the corresponding features between commemorations and biographical narratives?

- Which social frameworks have been (and are) decisive in the past (and in the present) in the memory of the past?
- What are the basic characteristics of the commemorative practices in terms of myths, symbols, and rituals?

These questions are discussed throughout the study by means of the theoretical and methodological approaches to collective memory. The empirical findings of the study are presented particularly in chapters 5 and 6 of the thesis. A brief introduction to the structure of the whole study is elaborated in the following section.
However, before concluding this section one point should be mentioned about the language of the study. Following the arguments of feminist scholars and ethnographers, I have tried throughout the study to avoid using ‘turgid and polysyllabic prose’ and falling into the traps of ‘socspeak,’ as Mills perfectly describes it in his The Sociological Imagination (1959; 9). Instead, risking future criticisms about scientific objectivity, I have not followed the rules of ‘hygienic research’ (Stanley and Wise 1993; 153) nor the traditional method of presenting research findings in which the use of passive constructions denies the presence of the researcher. Instead, by emphasizing the presence of the researcher, I want readers to remember the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewed, which plays a role in the reconstruction of life stories.

I.III Structure of the Study
As briefly outlined in the previous sections of this chapter, I argue, using Halbwachs’ theory of collective memory, that remembering the past is a dynamic process and dependent on the conditions of the present, while present conditions are products of the past – past norms, values, traditions, thoughts, power relations. Ancient thinkers argued over the dialectical relation between past and present long before Halbwachs. For instance, Aristotle argues that memory is always realized through reasoning. The process of reasoning distinguishes memory from being merely a perception of images which is practised in the present. Hence, he says ‘memory is perception of the present but memory is of the past’ (Aristotle [2004]) and perception of the present always relies on what we have formerly seen, heard or experienced. Halbwachs emphasises the social character of memory by demonstrating the power of social frameworks in reconstructing the past. He argues that social frameworks (religion, family, class) structure the collective consciousness through which individuals’ memories of the past are shaped. In chapter 2, after briefly reviewing theoretical discussions of memory from ancient philosophers to modern thinkers, I argue how memory is understood as a social phenomenon in Halbwachs’ theory of collective memory. Then, by demonstrating the similarities between Halbwachs’ argumentation on social frameworks and Althusser’s theory of Ideological State Apparatuses, I aim to provide the theoretical basis for the concepts and social types generated through the analysis of the biographies and memory practices regarding 12 September. The second part of the chapter considers some recent concepts in memory studies, such as cultural/communicative memory (Aleida Assmann and Jan Assmann), postmemory (Marianne Hirsch), and the theoretical framework of
memory practices (Pierre Nora, Paul Connerton). Finally, by focusing on the concept of cultural trauma (Caruth, Alexander), I discuss how individuals experience, and thus remember, a ‘traumatic’ past according to the historical, cultural and social structures and relations by which they are surrounded.

Chapter 3 focuses on the research design: the qualitative methods of participant observation and biographical narrative interviewing; and field experiences such as the problems of building trust and entering the field. In addition, this chapter contains a discussion of the biographical case reconstruction method and its compatibility with collective memory studies. Hence, the analytical steps in the biographical case reconstruction method, and in particular how lived life and narrated life are analyzed separately, as proposed by Rosenthal, are discussed in detail to demonstrate the features of it which overlap with collective memory theory and how the dynamic structure of reconstructing the past is analyzed in this study.

Chapter 4 consists of three main sections. These cover the historical, economic and social background of 12 September; the history of the revolutionary movement of the ‘70s in transnational politics; and the Turkish revolutionary movement in Germany. Marx writes in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852) that “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.” In this chapter, I examine the circumstances through which the revolutionary movement was generated, assuming that understanding the memory of 12 September would not be possible without knowing the historical background to the military coup and the revolutionary movement. Moreover, to analyze the mnemonic practices and narrations of the revolutionaries, it is crucial to understand the oppression (physical and ideological) that they experienced and how the State Apparatus exercised its power over the revolutionary movement while restructuring social, economic, political and cultural life.

Chapters 5 and 6 analyze the memory of 12 September of exiles in Germany and revolutionaries in Turkey in two forms; collective practices and biographical narratives. Thus, the former chapter focuses on commemorative practices, and the construction and use of myths, symbols and rituals, while the latter focuses on the biographies. Chapter 5 contains analyses of commemorative events as well as of memory places. Events commemorating 12 September, both in Germany and Turkey, are analyzed in order to
understand their power in biographical narrations. By focusing on the use of myths, the construction of symbols and ritual action I argue that the traditional links of the left-wing movement are formally similar to conservative religious practices. Similarly, by comparing the processes of producing memory places, namely the 12 September Shame Museum and the Ulucanlar Prison Museum, I demonstrate similarities in the reconstruction of the past by opposing groups.

Chapter 6 also consists of two main sections. The first focuses on the revolutionaries’ memories of some events and actors of 12 September in relation to commemorative events, and the second aims to generate the concepts involved in reconstructing the past of 12 September. In short, chapter 6 analyzes the collective embedded in the individual by demonstrating how the revolutionaries tend to reconstruct the past depending on their recent relations with social frameworks. In this chapter I also argue that political involvement is the dominant element in the memory of 12 September in comparison to a radical shift or a change of place. By comparing the reconstruction of the past of 12 September by exiles and revolutionaries in Turkey, I observe that there exist more similarities than differences, which was assumed at the beginning of the project. By using the concept of ‘frozen memory,’ I argue that memory of 12 September is considered a part of their collective identity by exiles in Germany and that change only plays a role when changes appear in home politics, but not when they take place in the spatial framework.

The Conclusion summarizes the empirical findings presented in chapters 5 and 6 in relation to the social frameworks of collective memory. I also discuss recent developments concerning 12 September and the politics of the AKP government, and how these recent changes are interpreted by the revolutionaries in Turkey and Germany. It is also shown that the revolutionaries both in Turkey and Germany tend to reconstruct the past more critically when their links with the politics of the past are weakened. In addition, I show how the continuing oppression by the junta institutions structures both the memories of the revolutionaries and the commemorative practices. By stressing the findings of the research in relation to recent politics of memory, the chapter aims to rethink the confrontation of the past of 12 September, which would be possible by not merely focusing on structural changes but also by involving the experiences of the actors (revolutionaries, victims and witnesses, and also perpetrators).
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION: LONGING FOR THE FUTURE IN SEARCH OF LOST TIMES

“Devrim vaktiyle bir ihtimaldi ve çok güzeldi.”

Murat Uyurkulak

We live in an age of fluctuating images, words and goods. Speed and the ‘new’ are the mottos of this new era. Both visually and verbally, we are faced with this acceleration in our daily life practices. The desire for speed and for the new, which trigger off rapid changes, however, ironically in turn produce the demand for memory: the more we forget the more we want to remember. Long before our digital age where memory is measured in megabytes and gigabytes and stored on digital devices, Pierre Nora (1989) warned us about the loss of memory in the modern age. He argues that we no longer live in memory (milieux de memoire), but we live between memory and history (lieux de memoire): “no longer quite life, not yet death, like shells on the shore when the sea of living memory has receded” (Nora, 1989; 12).

The demand for times past results in archival memory (Nora, 1989), an inflation of monuments and ‘musealization’ (Huyssten, 1995), as well as in a growing interest in autobiographies in the field of literature (Sarlo, 2012) and nostalgia. Academic interest in memory studies cannot be detached from the recent demand for remembering in the age of oblivion. Nevertheless, both the level of oblivion and the demand for memory depend on the past and present conditions which are unique for each society. In Germany, the interest in memory studies arose in the 1980s as a result of public debates concerning the problems of confronting and commemorating the past of the Second World War and the Holocaust (Olick, 1999). In Argentina, public debates on confrontation with the past were generated as a result of the politics of the first civilian government established after the end of the junta regime in 1983 (Perelli, 1994). For Turkey, public interest in the past, and the difficulties in confronting and commemorating a difficult past are somewhat new issues, not only for human rights organizations, trade unions and political groups, but also for academic researchers.

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82 The title of this chapter is inspired by Marcel Proust’s book In Search of Lost Times.

83 “Revolution was once a beautiful possibility.” Murat Uyurkulak, Tol: Bir İntikam Romanı, 2002, Metis; Istanbul.
majority of the works in this field consist of oral history books focusing on the stories of victims and survivors, and autobiographies by witnesses or survivors regarding the past of the Armenian Massacre, the Dersim Massacre, the 6-7 September Events and the 12 September Coup d’Etat. What is unique to the studies regarding 12 September is the weight of political economic analyses, in addition to the oral history studies, novels, memoirs and autobiographies. The main interest of these studies lies in an analysis of the general economic and political structures which resulted from the coup d’état and the changes that appeared in society afterwards. Hence, scholars dealing with superstructures analyse the characteristics, interests and benefits of the resulting institutions at the national and global level, focusing on macro analyses of the accumulation and distribution of capital, and neoliberal politics. In contrast, oral history works and literary works such as memoirs and autobiographies aim to ‘uncover’ the past stories of witnesses, survivors and victims and hence to challenge a hegemonic understanding of past events and the official history which turn a blind eye to events such as massacres and violent acts towards minorities.

Needless to say, the analyses of the superstructures – of the political and economic conditions of the past and the present – and the life stories of the actors, that is, macro-level analyses and the stories of individuals at the micro level, remain detached from each other. This research has aimed, first of all, to fill this gap by analysing the biographies of revolutionaries as products of past political, economic and social structures and also as products of present conditions. The empirical analysis of the biographies in this study has shown that remembrance of the past cannot be understood by abstracting life stories from the present conditions in which they are being structured. Recent political upheavals and the revolutionaries’ interest in these upheavals play an important role in the process of reconstructing life stories. The effects of recent changes upon life stories are strengthened by the activities, discourse and positions of the political organizations the revolutionaries are involved in. The images, thoughts and words invoked in the commemorative activities appear as active elements in the reconstructing of life stories.

A second aspect to this study, and something which is specific to it, is its methodological approach, which has aimed to understand the characteristic features of collective memory in biographical narratives. The approach of the study has been to apply the presentist approach of Halbwachs’ theory of collective memory to the method of biographical case reconstruction. Through comparison of lived lives and told lives in
the light of historical events and present conditions, the process of selectivity has been analyzed. Through narratives of selected events from the past, the effects of the present on the memory of the past and the dynamics of the process of selection (which of the events are emphasised, which remain unspoken, which are downplayed) have been analyzed. In addition, analysis of the biographies in the study has been interwoven with the findings from observations of commemorative events in order to understand the ‘collective’ in the ‘individual.’

Regarding the theoretical background of the thesis, my analysis of the memory of the past of 12 September are rooted in overlapping features of Halbwachs’ understanding of social frameworks and Althusser’s theory of State Apparatuses. The social frameworks of memory are, hence, considered along two separate, but nevertheless overlapping, dimensions: those that function as repressive apparatuses and those which function as ideological apparatuses. I have argued that the State, which was restructured by the junta regime, operated with its military forces, courts, prisons, torture centres and police stations as a repressive apparatus on the one hand; and on the other hand by establishing new institutions, introducing laws on censorship and intervening in education it aimed to transform cultural and daily life. In other words, the State used its ideological apparatuses to impose its ideology and legitimise its violent acts towards opposing groups.

The study has shown that the main difference in remembering 12 September between the revolutionaries who reside in Turkey and exiles living in Germany derives from the continuing repression by the junta’s institutions and the restrictions which are still experienced by the revolutionaries in Turkey. Therefore, while the past of 12 September is an important part of politics in Turkey in general, it is a particularly strong interest of left-wing politics. Practices remembering 12 September therefore include recent political upheavals, as they are a continuation of the 12 September regime. The analysis of the commemorative practices held in Germany has shown the strong interest of the exiles’ organizations in ‘home’ politics. Although exiles do not directly experience the oppression of the Turkish State, they adopt the recent political perspectives of their ‘brother’ organizations in Turkey in reconstructing the memory of 12 September. Therefore, apart from the absence of state oppression and a special emphasis on the condition of being political exiles, the commemorations practised in Germany share similar characteristics to those held in Turkey.
The past of 12 September, especially since the referendum held in 2010, have become a favoured topic in public debates. The events of the junta period and the figures from the revolutionary movement are to some extent highlighted by the media in Turkey. However, the exiles in Germany lack these kinds of public debates or recognition. Memory of 12 September is limited to the groups of exiles, which also results in less multiplicity and diversity in reconstructing the past among the members of the groups. On the other hand, the significance of the past of 12 September for the exiles is its interpretation as the event which forms their collective identity as exiles. 12 September is the very reason for their suffering homelessness, and thus the reason for their break from everything related to their past at home: the loss of family members and friends, separation from places, people and language – a break which caused the disappearance of everything they used to belong to and difficulties in adapting to new social frameworks, new places, a new language, new institutions and a new culture. For the exiles, the past of 12 September is a tool for holding onto the things that they lost by becoming exiles. At the same time, the exiles’ arrival in Germany is a turning point which distances them from the possible injustices still in existence in the homeland, and hence a turning point which constructs the memory of 12 September as a distant history. For them, it is a dynamic element of identity construction but it is also almost pushed into the field of history: it becomes stable and frozen; it was “once upon a time” rather than in the present; it was “there” not “here”. Unlike the revolutionaries who reside in Turkey, for the exiles the memory of 12 September finishes with their arrival in Germany.

The prominent characteristics of the practices commemorating 12 September are heroization, victimization, sacralization, exclusion and inclusion. Although the various groups commemorate different events or figures, depending on their political closeness to them, the structural characteristics of the commemorative practices, the formal structures of their performance and the production of symbols and myths are common to all the groups. The image of the revolutionary is constructed through a discourse of both heroization and victimization. Executed revolutionaries function as symbols of the brutal violence inflicted on the revolutionaries, but also as symbols of innocence and courage. Memory of them is crucial both to remembering the crimes committed by the supporters of the junta and also to ‘proving’ to the perpetrators that despite being executed they continue to exist in the memories of others.
In their commemorative activities the revolutionary groups repeat traditional rituals. Places (graves, prisons), objects (flags, flowers, letters and photos of the executed revolutionaries), rule-governed activities (moments of silence, reciting poems, revolutionary marches), symbols (party flags, symbols of communism) are used to compose a discourse of sacralization. The formal structures of the commemorations are rooted in religious rituals, although the content and the aim of the commemorations derive from the need for continuity and solidarity among the group members. The analysis of the biographies and commemorative events has shown that the ’78 Revolutionary Movement is remembered together with the leaders, myths and symbols of the previous revolutionary movement, the ’68 Movement. The execution of the leaders of the ’68 Movement constructed the ground for the interest of the ’78 generation in revolution. In addition, revolutionary struggle is interpreted as an ‘inheritance’ left to the members of the ’78 movement by the revolutionaries of the previous generation. Memories of the ’78 Revolutionary Movement and the 12 September Coup are not abstracted from their political, economic and historical context, and neither are they from the situation at the international level. The revolutionaries do not limit their understanding of the coup d’état to their own experiences but they elaborate on the neo-liberal politics of the post-junta regime, the economic interests of international organizations such as the IMF and World Bank, and on cultural transformation at the commemorations and in their biographical narratives. Similarly, memory of the perpetrators is not limited to the officers who carried out acts of physical and psychological violence on the revolutionaries. At commemorative events, systematic violence, ‘Turkification’ and destruction of self-esteem to weaken the revolutionary movement are discussed as violations of human rights and crimes against humanity. The revolutionaries’ biographies support this argument repeated at the commemorations. The revolutionaries’ narratives of tortures are quite similar in terms of methods and strategy. Although the revolutionaries interviewed were arrested and tortured in various cities and towns, the torture equipment used and the language of the officers who tortured them show that torture was practised systematically and the officers were trained in human physiology and psychology. Therefore, the crimes of the perpetrators cannot be reduced to a ‘physical and psychological’ punishment of ‘criminals’ by a few deviant officers but rather must be considered a crime of the state, which by injuring the imprisoned revolutionaries aimed to repress society in general in order to succeed in ideological transformation.
Through the narratives of the revolutionaries, I have argued that the transformation in politics and in economic, cultural and daily life caused isolation for the revolutionaries. In addition to the state laws which prevented ex-prisoners from working for state institutions, the revolutionaries experienced difficulties in adapting to the rules of the job market, which became more competitive after the coup. Their isolation was not limited to being excluded from economic activities, but was also felt through the alienation and planned obsolescence they experienced, which were results of their difficulties in adapting to the individualistic structure of society, rapid changes and the new values of the consumer culture. Moreover, as a result of prohibitions on political activities, the revolutionaries were forced to not become involved in political activities and to hide their past involvement, which resulted in ‘survival-isolation’ (Gotesky, 1965).

Finally, through the analysis of the biographies two types of remembering 12 September have been conceptualized, and they are also common to the commemorative events: reflected memory and wounded memory. In commemorative events, the memories of the revolutionaries are embedded in symbols and myths. For instance, a revolutionary who is executed at a young age symbolizes the innocence of the revolutionaries. Hence, commemoration of that revolutionary is not limited to the single person, but his image becomes a ‘tool’ for reflecting the pain of others. Through the memory of an executed revolutionary, the surviving revolutionaries ‘re-visit’ their own memories. The biographies similarly function as reflective memories in the cases of lost loved ones. Whether the lost loved one is an important figure for the community or not, the experience of death dominates all the other experiences of those who continue to live. The biographers on the one hand downplay their own memories of suffering from violence, and on the other hand their memory is reflected in the memory of the lost loved one.

Be it remembered, repressed, ignored or forgotten, violence leaves traces in memory. In the case of the memory of 12 September, there is a strong will among the revolutionaries for recognition of the violence they had to experience. After a long period of silence in society about the brutal violence exercised by the state apparatuses, the revolutionaries now face the difficulties of constructing a ‘proper’ memory politics in order to elaborate on the violent acts of the state. The essential problem seems to be memory which is wounded. In the production of memory places, in the memory politics of the revolutionary organizations and at commemorative events, violence dominates
The discourse. The domination of violence in the memory of 12 September cannot be explained only as a strategy to remind the perpetrators of the crimes they committed, but also needs to be understood together with the will for recognition on the part of the masses who remained in silence and ignorance. Until the brutal violence the revolutionaries experienced is recognized by society, wounded memory will continue to be the dominant characteristic of remembering the past. The pain which was experienced by some and ignorance of it by others continue to divide people like an iron curtain: we and they. Perelli (1994) uses the term “Memoria de Sangre” to discuss the Argentinian case. It literally means blood memory, and it “arises from an experience of fear, hardship, pain, and loss so extreme as to turn it into the salient fact of the past” (Perelli, 1994; 40). Perelli argues that ‘spilled blood’ is a mark which distinguishes people through the experience of violence in which “blood is a boundary” (Perelli; 40). Unlike the Argentinian case, Turkey’s attempts at confrontation started many years after the ‘blood’ was spilled. The ones who were not seen as they bled badly for years still have wounds which are open to being healed or to bleeding again.

In the narratives of 12 September, the revolutionaries emphasise two things: the loss of past memories and the loss of dreams for the future. Photographs from their childhood or school days have been destroyed, their friends and family members were lost, either when they were imprisoned or when they had to leave their hometowns or countries in exile. Their personal, political and social relations have been destroyed. The material surroundings of memory have been destroyed or modified. The revolutionaries feel the absence of memory places (not only the places where they were tortured and imprisoned, but also the places which have symbolic importance for the resistance movement, such as Taksim Square) and of other physical memory sites such as monuments and memorials. The present is senseless without the past which generated it. On the threshold of confronting the past, Turkey should not only focus on the victims in the past, but also should aim to return respect for the past lives of the revolutionaries who are alive in the present.