

Collective Memory and Media

The Case of Missing Persons
Issues in Cyprus

Dilan İFTİ



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*To the women and the men of Cyprus who make me believe
I can inhabit stories and memory...*

Dilan IFTI

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Ciftci has delivered presentations at various conferences in Cyprus and Turkey. She has published articles in international journals and books on her field. She prefers to work within the framework of war and peace studies on a variety of topics such as collective memory, reconciliation, negotiations, forgiveness and peace journalism.

PREFACE

In the field of conflict resolution, which is my field of interest, we say that 'conflict and war can be profitable' even while we acknowledge that ethno-national conflicts inflict a great deal of pain, suffering and trauma on the two sides directly involved in the conflict which will need to be addressed in the search for a solution. The Cyprus conflict 'has become an industry' is a phrase I have heard many times: many politicians and organizations made their professions out of the conflict; many Cypriots became rich on the conflict; many diplomats and international mediators built their careers on the Cyprus conflict; students and scholars published their research and PhDs on the Cyprus conflict. Although there is a plethora of literature on the Cyprus conflict there is scant research on looking at the role of the media in both promoting the conflict and also contributing to its accommodation as well as its role in forming public opinion on different contested issues. The coverage of sensitive political issues which in conflict situations are selective often promote the construction of an exclusive collective memory of their own side. What we choose to remember and memorialize and what we choose to forget both constitute a political praxis.

In the Cyprus context both have been applied especially in the 'I will not forget' slogan in the Greek Cypriot community. Both the media and public education have used it for decades to remind Greek Cypriots of their lost homes and memories in the northern part of the island and thus calling upon them to claim their right of 'return' in conditions of safety. This call and memory has been transferred inter-generationally. In the Turkish Cypriot side, the slogan 'we shall not forget' had a very different narrative and meaning making. The Turkish Cypriots will not forget what they experienced from the Greeks in the mid sixties which was expulsion and violence and missing persons. This too has been transferred inter-generationally. Can we say this is another form of violence i.e. the imposition of remembering on the generations that have had no experience or memory of the traumatic events that preceded their birth? Can the two selective collective memories be brought together in conversation? Can the media play a role in this conversation? Can the selective and collective silencing of the past of the other be as legitimate as the past of one's own community's? In the last three decades or more there have been both scholarly writings and activist work on the part of civil society promoting reconciliation and a holistic view of the conflict from the different perspectives and interpretations.

It is an intellectual pleasure for me to write the preface to Dr Dilan Çiftçi's book *Collective Memory and Media: The case of Missing Persons Issues in Cyprus*,

which fills a gap with regard to the study of the relationship between the media and the construction of collective memory with reference to the case of the missing persons in contemporary violent incidents in Cyprus- 1958, 1963, 1964, 1974. Each side to the conflict has produced different narratives-official and unofficial- about these historical events. The question of the missing persons in the Turkish and Greek Cypriot communities, a deeply humanitarian issue, has been often instrumentalized by official elites and the suffering and pain of the relatives and families often politicized and feminized. In her book Dilan shows how different published news items may influence the way Cypriots view themselves and exert judgement on the present situation in Cyprus.

The book poses very poignant questions: Can we trust memory, both individual and collective? Or do we constantly construct and reconstruct collective memory to fit certain interpretation of the past especially in deeply-protracted conflicts like the case of Cyprus? Is collective memory often used as a tool to demonize the 'bad other' and to victimize our side as the 'just one'? In recent years a new field of interdisciplinary study has developed referred to as 'Memory Studies' in an effort to understand how historical events and certain personality types impact the agendas on social and political events of the now and how memory is manipulated. The book makes mention of this new field and the critique it received by different scholars studying personal narratives and especially collective memory. Dilan is very knowledgeable of the literature and offers the reader an extensive review and discussion on the different theories dealing with memory and also how the media sometimes instrumentalize this issue to promote a certain political view or a specific narrative. The author discusses the different histories, perspectives and treatment of the issue of the missing persons in each Cypriot community. Conflict-related disappearances of people from the Greek Cypriot community, which remains a major trauma for that community, spanned across four months in 1974 after the Greek junta engineered coup d'état and the Turkish intervention when the island was de facto divided. The number of missing persons among the Greek Cypriot community is close to 1,500, with many of their relatives believing that they remained alive until they received evidence to the contrary. Approximately 500 Turkish Cypriot missing persons were the result of inter-communal fighting in 1958 and 1963-1964, for which they blame the Greek Cypriots. The official authorities told the relatives that they were all dead. While there is a United Nations sponsored team whose task is to locate and exhume the remains of those who went missing as a result of the conflict, identifying and returning these remains to their relatives, the issue of missing persons remains an open wound awaiting justice, forgiveness and a process of reconciliation.

The author uses the latest theories on collective memory and the role of the media to understand, analyse and discuss the case of the missing persons in the Turkish Cypriot community based on information and data derived from TAK, the official Turkish Cypriot New Agency of the Turkish Cypriot community. She looked at the period of seven years (2010-2016), coding all the stories, public statements, press releases, press conferences and interviews. She also used translated stories from the Greek Cypriot press about the missing persons issue. From this extensive research the author notes: “Media is an optimal means of memory construction. It also provides a means of historical interpretation of the past, an interpretation manipulated through political and social advocates which results in the distortion of public understanding of complex issues such as the Missing Persons Issue.”

The contribution of the book is that it goes beyond the usual sources of remembering which are the official historiographies, national struggle museums and commemorations to include the media as an alternative source of memory by validating what is preserved and reinforced in the Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriot knowledge of past events.

This book represents a significant contribution to the field of media studies, memory studies, and peace studies and trauma. It will be of interest to all students in conflict resolution dealing with the Cyprus conflict and specifically those dealing with the question of the Missing Persons and its human and political significance. It also opens up new questions about the consequences of ethno-national conflicts and the important role the media play in the construction and reconstruction of the past.

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LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Number of News Items on MPI Published by TAK between 2010 to 2016.....	71
Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations	74
Table 3. Percentage of Tones According to Archive Category and MPI	77
Table 4. Categories of Social Frameworks According to Archive Category	78
Table 5. Correlations Between Archive Category, Missing Persons' News Tones, Committee On Missing Persons News Tones, Mediated Reconstruction, Archived Memory Variables, Social Frameworks.....	82
Table 6: Number of Historical Time Categories According to Archive Category	82
Table 7. Summary of Simple Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Images' Social Frameworks and Symbols' Social Frameworks (N=941)	84
Table 8. Means and Standard Deviations	85

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Number of MPI Published by TAK Between 2010 and 2016.....	72
Figure 2. Number of Excavation Dates According to News Items Publication Years and Archive Category.....	75
Figure 3. Number of Tones (Neutral-Positive-Negative) According to MPI.....	76
Figure 4. Social Frameworks Categories According to News Items Publication Years in Turkish Cypriot Press	79
Figure 5. Social Frameworks Categories According to News Items Publication Years in Greek Cypriot Press	79

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

CMP	Committee of Missing Persons
CNA	Cyprus News Agency
CNN	The Cable News Network
CTP	Republican Turkish Party
ETA	Euskadi Ta Askatasuna
EOKA	National Organization of Cypriot Fighter
EU	European Union
F	Variance Anlaysis
FRA	Fotal Retrogade Amnesia
ICRC	International Committee of Red Cross
KKTC	Kuzey Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti
<i>M</i>	Mean
MG	Mass Graves
MM	Missing Martyr
MP	Missing Person
MPI	Missing Persons Issue
MPR	Missing Persons Relatives
<i>n</i>	Sample Number
NGOs	Non-governmental Organizations
<i>p</i>	Probability
<i>r</i>	Correlation
SB E	Standardized Beta Error
<i>SD</i>	Standard Deviation
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
<i>t</i>	Critical Value
TAK	Turkish Cypriot News Agency
TMT	Turkish Resistance Organization
TRNC	Turkish Republic of North Cyprus
UBP	National Unity Party
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America
α	Alpha
β	Beta
R^2	R-squared
χ^2	Chi-square

CONTENTS

Preface.....	v
List of Tables.....	viii
List of Figures.....	viii
List of Abbreviations and Symbols.....	ix
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Memory Studies.....	1
Media Attention in Memory Studies	2
2. THEORIES OF MEMORY AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY	5
Maurice Halbwachs: Collective Memory	7
Jan Assmann: Cultural Memory & Aleida Assmann: Functional Cultural Memory	12
Reinhart Koselleck & Todd Samuel Presner: Negative Memory	17
Henri Bergson: Matter and Memory	19
Relevance of Theories to the Comparative Analysis.....	21
3. POLITICS OF MEMORY: THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE AND TRUTH	25
The Epistemology of Historical Knowledge.....	26
The Documentary Phase: Archived Memory	28
Historical Time.....	29
Testimony	31
The Archive and Documentary Proof	32
Explanation and Understanding	33
From the Idea of Mentality to that of Representation	36
Representation and Narration	36
Representation and Rhetoric	37
The Historian's Representation and The Prestige of the Image	38
Research Findings of Communicating Collective Memory	40

4. MEMORIES OF CONFLICTS, CONFLICTS OF MEMORIES	43
Rusell Jacoby: Collective Silence/ Social Amnesia.....	43
History, Memory and Politics: Truth and History Discussion.....	44
Psychological Trauma.....	44
Paul Connerton: Seven Types of Forgetting	46
Enzo Traverso: How We Use History? History, Memory and Politics	48
Traumatic Memory	51
Identity, Trauma and Memory.....	51
Media Construction and Representation of Memory: Mass-mediated Memory ..	52
Memory Institutions, Forms and Practices	55
Placing Journalism Inside Memory and Memory Studies	57
Missing Persons Issues and the Committee of Missing Persons and the Cyprus Conflict.....	59
The History of Cyprus Conflict.....	59
Cyprus Conflict and UN Peacekeeping	60
Missing Persons Issues in Cyprus	61
Committee of Missing Persons	63
5. ARCHIVE STUDY ON COLLECTIVE MEMORY: MISSING PERSONS ISSUES IN CYPRUS.....	67
Official Information Provider TAK News between the years 2010-2016	69
The Collective Memory of Missing Persons Issues	71
General Information	71
Tones of News Items	76
Social Frameworks	77
Mediated Reconstruction of Missing Persons Issues.....	80
Historical Time of Collective Memory of Missing Persons Issues	82
Documentary Proof of Missing Persons Issues.....	83
Testimony, Symbols and Images of Missing Persons Issues	83
6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	87
REFERENCES.....	95
INDEX.....	103

1.

INTRODUCTION

Memory Studies

In recent years, attention to the notion of collective memory has experienced a sharp increase in the literature. At its core, collective memory has attracted interest for its effect not only on maintaining, but also constructing social hegemonies, ideologies, and political agendas (Irvin-Zarecka, 2017; LeGoff, 1996; Linenthal & Engelhardt, 1996; Macmillian, 2009; Olick, 1999; Olick & Robbins, 1998; Pennebaker, et. al., 2013; Romano, 2015; Seixas, 2004; Wineburg, 2001). Moreover, it is essential to add socially derived memories to collective political and historical consciousness (Halbwachs, 1950, 1952; Lipsitz, 2001; Pennebaker & Basasik, 1997). In other words, 'collective memory' in general refers to the process of how societies collectively remembers, interprets and forgets their past (Halbwachs, 1952; Assmann, 2007; Bergson, 1992) This study book '*Collective Memory and Media: The Case of Missing Persons Issues in Cyprus*' focuses on how these differently interpreted memories influence the ways in which Cypriots see themselves, judge their circumstances, and at the same time significantly guide their decisions in the present situation of the Cyprus Conflict.

The public attention to collective memory has become a central actor in both cultural and political discourse as it raised its frequency of conflicting interpretations of past events. Increasing conflicts over the validity and meaning of different interpretations of the historical past is have become common both in debates from over different subjects such as the creation of public memorials, and the contemporary negotiation process (Garde-Hansen, 2012; Macmillian, 2009; Nash, et.al., 2000). On the other hand, apart from the frequency in which the past is used, several historians and researchers from different social science disciplines use collective memory as a rhetorical device in political debate in order to show, manipulation and distortion of collective memory is an exercise in propaganda among different political forces (Cannedine, 2004; Le Goff, 1996; Linenthal & Engelhardt, 1996; Macmillian, 2009; Seixas, 2004; Wineburg, 2001).

Critically, the academic literature (Riessman, 2005; Papadakis, 2008) on narratives has noted that collective memory is definitive and precise and this might

be used to cue the re-interpretation or revision of the historical past. These studies have differentiated in their methodologies and results, as in the case of experimental studies which demonstrate details of how the process of recall is activated, neglected or manipulated in the public mind. In several studies the point of what people choose to remember and then interpret what they have remembered focuses attention more on the potential role of manipulation where interpretations might play (Le Goff, 1996; Linenthal & Engelhardt, 1996; Macmillan, 2009; Seixas, 2004; Wineburg, 2001).

We need to establish a clear understanding of the ways in which collective memory is constructed, and how that memory contributes to social cohesion among multicultural societies between political histories and 'collective memories' of the past. The term *collective memory* has been rooted in French social psychologist Maurice Halbwachs' (1952) concept as a socially constructed phenomenon. Historians and social/political theorists emphasize political actors' deftness in the manipulation process of this collective memory and socially shared representations. By promoting particular interpretations of past events via historiographies, national museums, commemorations and growing attention to the traditional and new media networks, propagandists can reinforce particular ideologies to influence social understanding of the Cyprus conflict and reconciliation processes as well.

Media Attention in Memory Studies

This study uses narratives, framing theories and content-analysis to examine how collectively significant events become selectively incorporated into historiographical representations of the past in order to give a political perspective to the reconciliation process, and to shape the understanding of others, and media attention to reference cultural symbols. The analysis of narratives finds that identifying long-lasting links among conceptions of historiography is essential for critically understanding the framing of current events in the Cyprus conflict and for the reconciliation process, which helps in perceiving how both communities view the relative stability and legitimacy of truth and knowledge – especially at a time of growing efforts towards negotiation and reconciliation.

Memory studies have evolved into a paradigm in the search of a meaning. Therefore there is limited recent literature on how collective memories are made manifest in commemorating specific historical events and persons and how they affect present politics and public opinions (Hasian & Carlson, 2000; Kitch, 2003; Parry-Giles & Perry-Giles, 2000; Peri, 1999) and how they appear in text and im-

agery (Bruner, 2002; Hasian & Carlson, 2000; Kitch, 2003; Schudson, 1993). In the process, the theoretical background of collective memory has been stretched to include a broad span of conceptualization from different theories. This study will be important as few scholars have focused on identifying collective memory as a cultural product which has led to the neglect of how collective memory was constructed and the main sources of this construction.

In fact, there is a growing body of research looking at the relation between media and collective memory through historical narratives and media narratives. In the Cyprus Conflict in general, there is a never-ending cycle of information and attempts for reconciliation over 40 years of division. This cycle has been bombarding both communities: Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots, and both are directly or indirectly manipulated about how they collectively retain and forget past events. It is, in fact, a process structured by how information is accessed and applied as part of the historical narrative used to construct both collective identity and the collective present. By looking at the history of the Cyprus Conflict we can see that experience of the historical past, negotiation process, details of a possible reconciliation, and associations mediated collective memory have been recurring over time. At this point, media is crucial in terms of not only drafting the knowledge which both communities remember of the past, but also selecting what subsequent generations recall, forget, revise or interpret historical past events in the present (Edy, 2006; Foner, 2002; Fowler, 2007; Kitch, 2005; Irwin-Zarecka, 1997; Zelizer, 2010).

Media is an optimal means of memory construction. It also provides a means of historical interpretation of the past, an interpretation manipulated through political and social advocates which results in the distortion of public understanding of complex issues. This is what unfortunately happened to the negotiations process in the Cyprus Conflict and the political agenda of both communities (Baudrillard, 1995; Edy, 1999; Le Goff, 1996; Macmillan, 2009; Morris, 2004; Reynolds, 2000; Schwartz, 1992; Seixas, 2004; Sturken, 2008; Wineburg, 2001; Zelizer, 2010). Collective memory studies with their complex and enthusiastic nature have struggled to develop suitable approaches to study collective memory processes; however, some studies have centred on the representation of specific events by media settings maintenance over time (Edy, 2006; Kansteiner, 2002; Kitch, 2005; Wertsch, 2002; Zelizer, 2010). Media also has an important role in presenting interpretations of the past to new generations (Johnson, 2004). While some studies highlight social memories by commemorating events' anniversaries (Kitsch, 2005), others include the debates over the "guilt of nations" and what to include or exclude from history texts (Morris, 2004; Vidal-Naquet, 1993).

The current study will substantially contribute to improving the understanding of the role of media in collective memory construction in conflicted communities. First, it will demonstrate that media serves as a cultural canvas upon which lies the diversification of the conflicting frame; it promotes collective memories of past events and reinterprets them in the light of the current circumstances especially in protracted social conflicts, as it is the case with the Cyprus Conflict. Second, the study will also demonstrate that official historiographies, national museums and commemorations are not the sole source for remembering, media also serves as an alternative source of memory by validating what is preserved and reinforced as in the Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots knowledge of past events. Third, the study's specific attention to identifying Turkish Cypriot News Agency's (TAK) news items in recalling the Missing Persons Issues (MPI) becomes an official information provider of collective memory construction involved in conflict zones. It also establishes a systematic basis for categorizing mediated reconstruction and framing, which advocates those responsible for shaping and preserving the collective memory construction process. Lastly, the study will contribute to media studies by assembling a ground of media effects in recalling functions in collective memory literature.

This study is expected to contribute to our knowledge of *how* memories of missing persons are created in the official discourse of the news agency TAK, the factors that influence the construction, and the process by which meaning of the past is transformed over time. The primary significance of this study lies in its investigation of mnemonic framing as a competitive process among multiple sources and frame advocates in the news media. Specific questions involve the contexts in which news media serve as location for public discourse in collective memory construction, the influence of documentary proof and representation in that process, the circumstances under which existing frames change or transform and identification of sources/frame advocates frequently evident in these processes.

This study will also add to collective memory studies in general and the case of Cyprus in particular. Cyprus case is has always been attractive to social science studies as just a few studies on memory, collective memory and media attention have been conducted on the memory studies. Therefore, this study will present the concepts of memory and media attention based on the empirical results, which may also have been tackled from different points of view in other studies. The significance of this study lies in its being a primary source for combining collective memory and media studies in the Cyprus case.