Past—Present—Fieldwork

Anthropological Contributions at the Intersection of Memory, Power, and Culture

Noura Kamal, Eva Kössner and Klaudia Rottenschlager (eds.)

Conference Report Vienna Anthropology Days 2013
Austrian Studies in Social Anthropology (ASSA)

Contents

Introduction
Eva Kössner ... 3

Re-imaging Collective Memory: Spatial-visual transformations of divisive imagery in Northern Ireland
Irina Scheitz ... 7

Remembering the Nation: Perspectives on South African memory culture
Lucie Bernroider ... 13

Connecting Past and Future—Negotiating Present: Memories and belongings in post-war Sarajevo
Sanda Üllen ... 18

Remembering Oslo: Background to a research project on young Palestinian migrants
Eva Kössner ... 24

Experiences from the Field: Nablus under siege and occupation
Noura Kamal ... 32

Authors and Editors ... 37

Kamal, Noura, Eva Kössner and Klaudia Rottenschlager (eds.) 2014: Past—Present—Fieldwork: Anthropological contributions at the intersection of memory, power, and culture. Conference Report Vienna Anthropology Days 2013. In: Austrian Studies in Social Anthropology, Sondernummer KSA-Tage 2013 (*ISSN 1815-3404)*

Introduction[1]

Eva Kössner

The present volume contains five papers presented at the workshop "Past—Present—Fieldwork: Theoretical and methodological aspects of researching intersections of memory, power, and culture" that Noura Kamal, Klaudia Rottenschlager and I organized at the Vienna Anthropology Days on the 6th of May 2013. Working together for several years on questions of violence and memory in the Middle East, we aimed to discuss these topics in a broader context and wanted to interconnect with colleagues working in other geographic areas. We especially invited MA and PhD students to present their work in progress, because we wanted to provide a platform for addressing ongoing theoretical and methodological questions of young scholars at different research stages. The two themes that crosscut and connect the contributions of this reader are the relations of memory to aspects of culture on the one hand and to power on the other.

As all contributors demonstrate in their papers, today memory production isn't understood as a passive narration of facts, but rather as an active process of the creation of meanings (e.g., Cattell and Climo 2002; Lambek and Antze 1996). Memories are (re)produced in different cultural contexts and expressed through multiple representations. This makes memory the ideal research field for social anthropologists, as their discipline provides methodologies that are adequate for approaching these multiple dynamics and has put forth theories that are essential for analyzing and understanding them. Due to the dependence of memory production on spatial and temporal contexts, empirical research on remembering and its representations has to be deeply rooted in daily life. This can best be done by a researcher who participates in local processes as it is common in ethnographic fieldwork. In theoretical regards, social anthropologists have helped to understand remembering as multiple, context-related and deeply social processes encompassing individuals and groups, especially in areas that study memory as embodied practices (Connerton 1989; Bloch 1993), silencing and keeping memories of violence secret (Das 2007; Robben 2011), agency and resistance within commemorative practices (Allen 2008) as well as intergenerational transmission (Argenti and Schramm 2012) and the relation of memory to identity and nationalisms (Malkki 1995).

Memory and Culture

Using this kind of processual approach to memory implies its strong connection to cultural aspects of everyday life. *Irina Scheitz* in her analysis of divisive imagery in the city of (London)Derry in Northern Ireland, shows two complementary ways how culture and remembering are intertwined. On the one hand, visual cultural manifestations are an essential part in present-day memory production of Protestant and Catholic groups within an environment that is socially and physically segregated. On the other hand, in the course of re-imaging

[1] We would like to thank Rosalind Willi for revising all the articles of this reader.

Kamal, Noura, Eva Kössner and Klaudia Rottenschlager (eds.) 2014: Past—Present—Fieldwork: Anthropological contributions at the intersection of memory, power, and culture. Conference Report Vienna Anthropology Days 2013. In: Austrian Studies in Social Anthropology, Sondernummer KSA-Tage 2013 (*ISSN 1815-3404)*

projects, people try to find cultural manifestations that do not fall into the trap of sectarianism and might help to overcome social fragmentation.

Lucy Bernroider also deals with a society fragmented through long-lasting and intensive conflict.[2] In her analysis of commemorative practices within the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission she detects particular narratives and their logics that frame what she names a specific “public memory culture”. Even though local remembering practices and contradictory narratives were undoubtedly present, “culturally sanctioned memories of large scale events” emerged and are used to construct a particular kind of past which is strongly connected to present-day identity formation.

Processes of identity and alterity in the context of memory (re)production are also addressed by *Sanda Üllen* in her paper about memories and belongings in post-war Sarajevo. Using the example of three young Bosnians and their memory practices she explains that the socio-cultural classifications are—amongst other things—also taking place alongside the dichotomy of “stayee” and “returnee”. As these categories are connected to further classifications like “cultured” and “non-cultured”, it becomes obvious not only how the term culture is charged, but what influence cultural categories can have on individual practices and strategies of remembering and forgetting.

In my own contribution about young Palestinian migrants and their memories of the period of the Oslo Accords, cultural aspects become relevant insofar as the question of memory (re)production in transnational social spaces challenges the idea of culture as a complex of knowledge and practices bound to a geographic space. Nevertheless, as each act of remem-bering takes place in a particular setting, cultural aspects remain core to this research project, also, for example, in the form of the examination of cultural codes within particular online spaces of today’s information and communication technology.

Although *Noura Kamal* focuses in her paper on her field experiences, she gives us an idea about the role of culture within her project on survival practices remembered in the city of Nablus in Palestine. She shows how people living under intense violent measures developed various ways of coping and surviving that entered everyday culture up until the present day.

Memory and Power

Like culture, memory brings together individual and social layers, whereby shared aspects of memory are addressed by terms as different as collective, social, cultural, public or popular memory. Regardless of the various ways these concepts are defined and despite the criticisms that can and have been raised against unifying terms of that kind, it is beyond dispute that memories are (re)produced and transmitted within social entities, groups or communities and that these social formations are, in turn, affected or even constituted by memory (re)produc-tion and its representations. As such, remembering involves continuous processes of negotiation and struggle, which entail different interrelated layers of power.

---

[2] Lucie Bernroider wasn’t able to deliver her announced lecture at the workshop but fortunately contributed to the present reader.

Nearly all the contributors touch upon the power of states or state-like entities or communities. Memory (re)production is usually strongly influenced by official narratives (or narratives claimed to be commonly accepted within a specific field), that often aim at promoting ideas about something like a shared (national) past. Particular representations of the past are promoted for instance through institutions, media, educational systems or visual manifestations whereas alternative narratives are silenced or kept secret for multiple reasons. In this regard, memories can serve to legitimize power, but they can also be used by victims for claiming rights or reproducing subversive identity markers. However, like *Irina Scheitz* and *Sanda Üllen* show, representations of memories are not only subversive or conformist and the related fault lines are far from running only along the division of state and civil society or civilians. Rather, quite manifold layers of belonging, affiliation and otherness are activated, reproduced and changed through remembering. And these processes do not end at national borders, like *Lucy Bernroider* demonstrates with the example of a particularly “western” human rights discourse in South Africa and I indicate in my contribution by addressing migrant life worlds and transnational social fields. Hence, a range of discursive strands and manifestations of memories are always available, and the challenge lies in finding the continuities and discontinuities in their appearance and usage. This leads us to another layer of power relevant in the presented papers, namely the power the researcher obtains by making particular representations of the past visible and thus favoring them at the cost of others.

Researching Memory

Like all the contributions to this reader demonstrate, memory is more than what is said and especially more than what is communicated to the researcher. Hence, narratives cannot serve as the only way to access memory (re)production. The representations of memory analyzed in the presented papers range from discursive practices of (re)producing oral history and written texts of different kinds to visual and performative manifestations of memories. This broad range indicates that memory studies are a very interdisciplinary field today. Within this, one of the most important strengths of anthropology has always been its ability to access non-verbal aspects of memory. Participating in everyday processes does not only allow us to access mnemonic practices or sites but to address memory in the sense of Johannes Fabian’s “memory work” (2007), which includes not only remembering but also forgetting as two sides of the same coin. Moreover, through ethnographic accounts remembering is perceived as something deeply rooted in the present and by this we are able to overcome the rigid and narrowing conceptual separation of past, present and future.

Final Remarks

The anthropological works presented here give us an idea of how important and fruitful the analysis of the interrelations between the field of memory with power and culture can be. Considering the different layers of power involved in the research of memory (re)production keeps us aware of the multiple forms of agency and authority and their influence on representations of memory and their very research. Additionally, keeping an eye on the various and dense relations of cultural and commemorative processes helps us to acknowledge the relations between both fields without falling into the trap David Berliner (2005) warned us

about, namely that of overextending memory to that extent that it becomes indistinguishable from culture.

The presented papers at the intersection of memory, power and culture furthermore indicate the role of young anthropologists in dealing with contemporary issues relating to social dynamics and conflict in (post)colonial conditions and in times of global uncertainty. This reader aims at making a small contribution to those broad and highly relevant debates.

References

Allen, Lori A. 2008. Getting by the Occupation: How violence became normal during the Second Palestinian Intifada. In: Cultural Anthropology 23 (3), pp. 453–487.

Argenti, Nicolas, and Katharina Schramm (eds.). 2012. Remembering Violence. Anthropological Perspectives on Intergenerational Transmission. New York and Oxford.

Berliner, David. 2005. The Abuses of Memory: Reflections on the memory boom in Anthropology. In: Anthropological Quarterly 78 (1), pp. 197–211.

Bloch, Maurice E. F. 1993. Time, Narratives and the Multiplicity of Representations of the Past. Bulletin of the Institute of Ethnology Academia Sinica 75, pp. 29–45 [republished in Bloch, Maurice E. F. 1998. How Do We Think They Think. Anthropological Approaches to Cognition, Memory, and Literacy. Boulder and Oxford, pp. 100–113].

Cattell, Maria G., and Jacob J. Climo. 2002. Introduction: Meaning in Social Memory and History: Anthropological perspectives. In: Climo, Jacob J. and Maria G. Cattell (eds.). Social Memory and History. Anthropological Perspectives. Walnut Creek, pp. 1–36.

Connerton, Paul. 1989. How Societies Remember. Cambridge.

Das, Veena. 2007. Life and Words. Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary. Berkeley and Los Angeles.

Fabian, Johannes. 2007. Memory against Culture. Arguments and Reminders. Durham and London.

Lambek, Michael and Paul Antze. 1996. Introduction: Forecasting memory. In: Antze, Paul and Michael Lambek (eds.). Tense Past. Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory. New York and Abingdon, pp. xi–xxxviii.

Malkki, Liisa Helena. 1995. Purity and Exile. Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania. Chicago and London.

Robben, Antonius C. G. M. 2011. Silence, Denial and Confession about State Terror by the Argentine Military. In: Six-Hohenbalken, Maria and Nerina Weiß (eds.). Violence Expressed. London, pp. 169–186.

Re-imaging Collective Memory: Spatial-visual transformations of divisive imagery in Northern Ireland[3]

Irina Scheitz

In Northern Ireland commemorations, memorials and anniversaries are big. Historical events and collective experiences are remembered extensively and in multiple visual and performative ways, most popularly known in form of parades, flag flying and large mural paintings on the windowless backsides of houses. The practices of remembering have become a part of cultural heritage itself, which is continuously invented, re-enacted, celebrated and defended.

Collective memory is an important element of the cohesion and collective identity in any society, at the same time it is the foundation for segregation and otherness.

> A social memory becomes a central facet of the ideological armoury of the group, helping to legitimise and rationalise difference by rooting it in the far-distant past and thus placing weight on the primordial or essential nature of the antagonisms or otherness. (Jarman 1997:6)

Particularly in societies that have experienced partition, internal violence and societal segregation, the issue of remembering and commemoration is a sensitive one, always carrying potential for violent upheaval and alienation to the respective "other side". In Northern Ireland this can be witnessed every summer during the so-called marching season, when the parades of Protestant loyalists and unionists cause riots on Belfast's streets, as members from the Catholic, Irish nationalist or republican population[4] see this unionist tradition as a sectarian provocation.[5] While parades provide a temporal source of conflict, this article focuses on a less spectacular form of commemoration which nevertheless affects people's everyday lives throughout the whole year. These are the visual manifestations of memory: symbols and images on flags, graffiti and most famously the murals that mark the residential areas of Protestant and Catholic so-called "single-identity" housing estates.

A Segregated City

I became interested in visual displays and spatial categories in connection to peace building when I conducted anthropological fieldwork in the second-biggest city of Northern Ireland, called either 'Derry', the Irish name for the city, or 'Londonderry', the British name for this

---

[3] This article is based on the findings in my master thesis (Scheitz 2012).

[4] In the Northern Irish context the terms "Protestant" and "Catholic" are seen as identity markers rather than as religious designations.

[5] The idea that a ban of these unsettling commemoration practices would improve the situation was impressively proved wrong this year when violence erupted after unionist marchers protested against a ban to march down a 300-meter stretch of their traditional route.

Kamal, Noura, Eva Kössner and Klaudia Rottenschlager (eds.) 2014: Past—Present—Fieldwork: Anthropological contributions at the intersection of memory, power, and culture. Conference Report Vienna Anthropology Days 2013. In: Austrian Studies in Social Anthropology, Sondernummer KSA-Tage 2013 (*ISSN 1815-3404)*

town that was planted by Protestant settlers in the 17th century.[6] From January to May 2011 I observed a city that was in an exciting transition process from being dominated by a violent conflict into becoming a city that is known for its culture and art scene.[7] Yet, the people committed to this task had several challenges to face, because (as the name issue already suggests) Derry is a segregated city. The river Foyle, which is at parts 400m wide, serves as a natural line for an artificially constructed demographical segregation between Catholics and Protestants. The 'Cityside', on the river's west bank, is almost exclusively inhabited by Catholics. Most members of the Protestant minority live on the east bank of the river, the 'Waterside', where the relational proportion between the two groups is more even (McCafferty 2001:83).

The current societal and physical segregation that exists in Derry has been created through the centuries-old conflict between Protestants and Catholics in which the city often was at the centre of struggle. The collective memories of Protestants and Catholics about the conflict are constructive parts of the two communities' antagonistic identity formations. This antagonism is largely expressed spatially and visually as residential areas are marked out by a vast range of symbols and images that categorize neighbourhoods and its residents into 'Protestant' or 'Catholic' and tell the other community to keep out. In a territorialized Protestant residential community the colours of the British Union Jack dominate on kerb stones and lamp posts, whereas in an out-marked Catholic area public space is decorated in green, white and orange, the colours of the Irish Tricolour.

Next to this territorial marking, murals, the famous and highly political wall paintings that have become tourist attractions, are another striking feature of Northern Irish residential space. Apart from paramilitary imagery which has been removed widely from public spaces during the peace process, the visual manifestations of Protestant collective memory are overtly based on events that happened in the 17th century, when a Catholic and a Protestant king fought a war for the English throne and the settler's plantation town Londonderry was besieged by a Catholic army. Themes on murals cover supremacy, pride and a kind of settler mentality which still feels under siege and threatened by the native enemy, but showing "no surrender" (as it is proclaimed on a mural in the Protestant 'Fountain estate', the only protestant housing estate that is left at Derry's Cityside).

In contrast, Catholic commemoration practices are based on the more recent history of the so-called 'Troubles', the area of violent outbreak from 1968/69 to the beginning of the peace process in 1998, when the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland stood up against their suppression. Also here, Derry was a hot spot and centre of rebellion against the predominantly Protestant security forces of the Northern Irish state and the British army. The violence against the Catholic civil rights movement during the 1970s, the killings on what became known in history as 'Bloody Sunday'[8] and the hunger strikes of republican prisoners are

[6] I decided to call the city Derry for practical reasons and also because most people I've talked to call the city like that. Calling the city Londonderry would be a stronger political statement.

[7] I carried out participant observation with a strong focus on visual aspects and spatial characteristics. Moreover I conducted 24 unstructured interviews with 25 different people and took part in meetings, talks and cross-community projects. However, what I *heard* in the interviews and conversations was equally important as what I *saw*.

[8] The term refers to the shooting of 13 civil rights protesters were shot by British soldiers during a peaceful march on 30th January 1972 (Holthusen 2005).

common themes on murals. They commemorate the dead as well as being permanent accusations against the British government. An anti-British attitude can still be found among Catholics in Derry which resulted in alienation of the minority and Protestants not feeling a real part of the city. Equally, Catholics feel offended by imagery that shows the symbols of Protestant supremacy before the peace process.

Not only because of rejection of the opposite cultural tradition displayed in the other community, but also because of fear places associated with the other side are avoided. The resulting lack of cross-community contact is further contributing to sectarianism and the segregation of Northern Irish society. Therefore, since the last eight years peace building in Northern Ireland started to work on the creation of neutral, shared and safe spaces in which both, Catholics and Protestants, feel comfortable. In this attempt, divisive visual displays had been recognised as one of the major barriers for the improvement of community relations. Although peace builders felt that the memories of conflict were holding people back, they also realised that it gave them pride, a feeling of belonging and meaning, therefore they could not just simply be removed from public space without approval.

The Production of a Shared Society

In 2006, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland launched a government-funded programme called "Re-imaging Communities" which started to work together with communities[9] on removing divisive imagery in their residential areas and to replace it with community artwork which should represent an aspect of a community's identity which is not associated with the conflict. Also in Derry re-imaging projects had taken place or were in the process of realisation at the time I conducted fieldwork. I became very interested in the various negotiation processes that were going on if dominant symbols of collective memory and identity/antagonism were questioned. In my thesis I dealt with the research question how space and visual symbols influence social relations and spatial practices and tried to understand how a shared space could be created.

In order to understand processes of spatial transformation and the interconnection of social relations, space and collective memory, I applied Henri Lefebvre's theory on the production of space (2004 [1991]). As space is not only a product but also an agent of production, space does affect society on many levels. As Lefebvre (2004 [1991]:39) described, space is a triad-dialectic between the physical dimension of space (*spatial practice*), which is the space that can be perceived by the senses; the conceptual, discursive dimension of space (*representations of space*); and the dimension of symbols and meanings (*representational space*)—which concerns the mural, flags and other visual manifestations of culture.

Residential space in Derry is dominated by symbolically loaded concepts of Protestant/ Catholic antagonism which impacts on spatial practices and perceptions of space as well as the production of collective antagonistic identities. Representational spaces that define the people living in these spaces as antagonist bodies have to be understood as—simultaneously influential—divisive spatial practices, concepts and lived social realities of people. Therefore,

[9] In Derry the term "community" is also used to describe the residents of one housing estate.

in order to achieve a truly shared space, transformations have to happen on a physical, a discursive and a symbolic level.

The re-imaging projects I observed were all very different in terms of their challenges, their procedure as well as their outcomes. However, each re-imaging process involved the following negotiation points:

1. Potential offensive imagery had to be identified and the reasons for their existence had to be addressed. Definition was not always easy, as even images that are not sectarian can carry potential offence. For instance, nationalist murals that remember the atrocities against Catholics committed by British authorities are not directly referring to Protestant/Catholic antagonism, yet, some people suggested, that as these images have become iconic among nationalists, they are feeding into the anti-British attitudes that alienate Protestant citizens.
2. Collective memory and identity was challenged and put into question publicly.
3. Social relations were negotiated and previous power relations altered (for example ex-paramilitaries agreed to let a residential community decide for themselves whether they want divisive imagery to stay or not).
4. New imagery that represents a community's identity had to be found in order to replace the old ones and to occupy cleaned spaces with new meaning to prevent sectarian imagery from coming up again.
5. A new concept of space and the usage of space were introduced. While public space has been considered as dangerous or respectively something to be defended from the other side, now the idea of making space welcoming and attractive was promoted. This development was accompanied by the wish to change the negative image of the city to become a centre of culture and arts in Northern Ireland.[10] Moreover, peace builders aspired to create a space that would be shared by both sides. However, how such a space should and could look like was still a process of negotiation.

Visual territorial marking and visual manifestations of collective memory have dominated public space to such an extent that they have become part of people's culture; however, not everyone wants this to be part of his or her own culture anymore. In communities where the everyday representations of divisive memory were removed, many residents felt relieved and freed from the dominant representations. It made way for other—more individual—identifications, like for example being a mother or a community worker that works on both sides. Moreover, the removal of threatening images made it easier for people from the other side to enter these spaces.

The re-imaging process involved a lot of negotiation between the members of a community. First of all, as people who were against it had to explain why it was important to them, divisive images were questioned and not taken for granted and solutions were sought to get everyone on board. From 2007 to 2009, Clooney Estate, the only mixed housing area in Derry, was the first community that went through a re-imaging process. They agreed to the removal of all their territorial markers, which were replaced by community artworks without divisive aspects. The clean-up of the run-down area as well as the artworks were financed by re-imaging programmes, but the community had to agree that sectarian imagery would not

[10] Here economic considerations concerning tourism and attractiveness to foreign investors also played its role.

come up again and that from now on, they were responsible for the appearance of their area. People's association with public space used to be dominated by conflict and uncertainty; concepts of wanting to live in a clean, attractive and welcoming environment were not paramount. Within the re-imaging process, which relied fully on dialogue and the involvement of the community as well as art, a new understanding of living space was introduced. After the first project was a success, more and more communities wanted to do re-imaging.

Re-imaged Spaces

While it used to be easy to differentiate between Protestant and Catholic areas a few years ago, today most housing estates look unspectacularly normal to a foreigner's eye. Only the community artworks that should serve as a replacement still refer to Catholic or Protestant culture, yet in a far more subtle way. As my interlocutors told me, finding aspects of their culture which had nothing to do with conflict was one of the most difficult things for most communities, particularly as almost everything political was forbidden. As a result, the outcome of many artworks is deemed as apolitical and a white-wash of history by critics of the programme. Particularly Derry's most famous mural artists, the Bogside artists, who portray the struggle of the Catholic community during the Troubles area, accused the City Council of neglecting their murals financially in order to satisfy the British financiers. Their murals which attract a lot of tourists are also a symbol of anti-colonialism. They are seen as non-sectarian but portray the inglorious sides of British involvement in the conflict. Nevertheless, considering the dominance of conflict-related images in Derry's housing estates, placing a visual display in public that is not considered either as Irish nationalist or unionist can be seen as a political statement in itself.

The question how to deal with divisive memory was always at stake: Some felt they should be placed into a museum away from people's everyday spaces. However, particularly in the Catholic Bogside area as well as in the Protestant Fountain estate, many community members defended their images as their cultural heritage and source of pride. Some offensive images were taken down, some re-imaging artwork came up, yet, transformation of space did not take place in neither of these areas; both were still marked as Protestant respectively Catholic territories as transformation of space only happened on a superficial level.

Yet, in other areas where re-imaging took place, all three dimensions of space were affected through the process and not only visual images but also social relations and concepts of space were altered. Moreover, a concrete change in the material form of visual manifestations of collective memory became recognisable as murals were increasingly replaced by three-dimensional sculptures, which centered representational elements of a community at one specific place. One area that went through re-imaging got a "garden of reflection" - the only reason of existence being to serve as a space to "reflect", external to the spaces of everyday life. The practices of remembering change from being ubiquitous to becoming a more private manner. While the murals force to remember, the sculptures and gardens invite you to do so. This does not mean that the big narratives of Irish and British identity vanished from public space but communities try to reconcile them with the new values of the peace process.

The outcome of my research shows that a successful re-imaging process of territorialised residential estates is an important step in breaking down barriers for positive cross-community contact as it can free people from the dominant identity ascriptions which are often based on spatial categories. This can contribute to the development of new identifications outside the Protestant/Catholic antagonism. It may still be a long process until Derry will be a shared city, yet as the re-imaging process in Derry showed, the transformation of divisive imagery sparks a negotiation process involving all three dimensions of space which lays the basis for the transformation of society.

References

Holthusen, Christoph. 2005. Der Nordirlandkonflikt: Geschichte, zentrale Aspekte und Lösungsmodelle unter völkerrechtlicher Betrachtung. In: Blumenwitz, Dieter (ed.). Schriften zum Staats- und Völkerrecht. Vol. 116. Frankfurt am Main (et al.).

Jarman, Neil. 1997. Material Conflicts. Parades and Visual Displays in Northern Ireland. New York.

Lefebvre, Henri, 2004 [1991]. The Production of Space. Transl. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford (et al.).

McCafferty, Kevin. 2001. Ethnicity and Language Change. English in (London)Derry, Northern Ireland. Amsterdam.

Scheitz, Irina. 2012. Derry, Londonderry, Legenderry – A City in Transition. Spatial and Visual Transformations of Territorialised Space and the Creation of Shared Spaces. Master thesis, University of Vienna.

Remembering the Nation: Perspectives on South African memory culture

Lucie Bernroider

Memory has emerged as a central point of interest within the humanities. In this paper I would like to give a quick introduction into the study of memory, before exemplifying ways to critically engage with memory narratives through some insights I gained through my own research on South African memory politics. Even though scholars have conceptualised memory in somewhat differing ways, most agree that it surpasses representation, stressing its dynamic force in social life. Indeed I would argue a case could be made to use the term remembering rather than memory, because it functions as an active process rather than a mere screen projection. Remembering then engages a complex field, as it relates, reproduces, interprets, distances, and appropriates a vision of the past. Hereby it works selectively and chooses different emphases, and can ultimately work to stabilize or conversely to destabilize a system. As Michael Lambek and Paul Antze argue, memory should be thought of as a practice, "not as a pre-given object of our gaze but as the act of gazing and the objects it generates" (1996:xii). Discussions of the practice of remembering allude to questions of cultural specificities, roles of social and symbolical tropes, rituals as well as the role of power and political motives in its production and reproduction. Lambek and Antze thus coin the term "memory work" (ibid.) as practices mediated through cultural acts, schemata and stories that comprise our collective and individual memories and shape what we think of them. These traits make it particularly interesting to anthropologists studying contemporary societies because any historical event emerges not as what really happened in the past but what and specifically how it is narrated in the present.

Theoretical Deliberations on Individual and Collective Memory

Any research involving the notion of remembering needs to acknowledge that memory practices are interwoven with culturally specific rituals. As such they can encompass a vast array of diverse strategies of thinking about the past, which in turn affect both the present and a projected future trajectory. Memory discourses also incorporate therapeutic and auto-biographical aspects in the construction of identity, thereby conflating private and public space and transcending the very distinction between them (Lambek and Antze 1996; Hodgkin and Radstone 2003). Thus a central issue of anthropological engagements with memory revolves around the connection between individual and collective memory, as it can be theorized in relation to the formation of the self as well as the community. Marxist theories focus on issues of class and subaltern perspectives, while more recent approaches have turned towards the role of transnational processes and the relation between the global and the local. Memory studies see an opportunity to connect these paradigms and theorise the role of the community in the emergence of individual subjectivity. Personal memory, they argue, cannot be considered as independent from collective formations such as common tropes and political imagery. I will illustrate some of the complex implications of this process through a brief

Kamal, Noura, Eva Kössner and Klaudia Rottenschlager (eds.) 2014: Past—Present—Fieldwork: Anthropological contributions at the inter-section of memory, power, and culture. Conference Report Vienna Anthropology Days 2013. In: Austrian Studies in Social Anthropology, Sondernummer KSA-Tage 2013 (*ISSN 1815-3404)*

exposition on my research[11] into the public memory culture in South Africa. However, let me first explore my theoretical understanding of public memory. As a form of collective memory it constitutes a particular narrative structure that is popularised and acts as a reference point for individual narratives. It thereby comes to function as a lens that steers perspective and to a certain degree predetermines individual narratives dealing with the past. Still, continuous renegotiation always takes place, as memory practices can be considered sites of incessant contestation, which never allow it to become permanently fixed.

Exploring South African Memory Politics

Let me now turn to the South African context, in which Apartheid dominated social life and political discourse in the second half of the 20th century. With the end of the Apartheid regime and the new nation building impetus, memory practices grew into an important issue on the political agenda. This can be directly related to memory's close and somewhat ambiguous association with identity politics. Culturally sanctioned memories of large-scale events supply a source for the consolidation of cultural identity that are integrated with or come to replace prior mechanisms of group cohesion. Memory is hereby used discursively to construct and legitimise identity (Hodgkin and Radstone 2003:8ff). The way any nation defines itself is intricately linked to the way it narrates its past. In South Africa the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) mediated this process as it led the discourse on collective memory and thereby authenticated specific types of individual narratives. It applied a strategy of relating to the past, which was based on legal conventions and therapeutic logic of catharsis, as well as an understanding of truth as a neutral concept accessible through legal proceedings. Powerful (yet not unproblematic) narrative prescriptions governed the TRC's work.

One such narrative prescription framing the TRC's project can be identified in the appropriation of what Christopher Colvin and other anthropologists have termed the *trauma story* (Colvin 2003), a narrative convention, which presupposed a story of healing through the exposure of a wound. Following a therapeutic logic towards closure and redemption, the trauma narrative remains mostly apolitical and nonspecific, thereby evading sociopolitical conditions and causes of political violence. The TRC thereby transferred psychologised concepts from individuals to collectivities, and defined symbolic and therapeutic articulations as the only viable path towards healing (Colvin 2003:153ff). By choosing personal trauma as its central theme it allowed social and material reparations in the aftermath of Apartheid's violence to remain on the margins of the public memory discourse. Issues pertaining to structural and ideological violence (such as how race, class and gender merge and aggravate experiences of violence) could also not be addressed because of its emphasis on individual stories and events (for a more detailed account of this see my own thesis 2012). The TRC's insistence on closure, meanwhile, acted as a containment strategy foreclosing any considerations of on-going effects as well as continuations of societal fissures. Testimonies at the TRC became readable within this framework of narrative conventions, making it necessary for witnesses to adhere to them in order to gain authentication and the symbolic and

[11] My MA thesis (Bernroider 2012) involved an in depth discourse analysis of South African memory culture, including both a look at the testimonies produced at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as well as South African fiction as literary approximation to documenting a nation's troubled past.

moral capital that come with it. The Commission also emphasised bodily violations as the central dimension of Apartheid's crimes and thus limited itself to a particular aspect of political terror, while neglecting other forms of suffering. Testifiers were expected to relate their stories within this narrative frame forcing them to accept the victim category administered to them. It thereby promoted a specific victim paradigm that made it difficult for a South African identity to find space to assert itself and reconstitute its agency. Stories not fitting into or actively resisting this narrative prescription found it difficult to enter into public memory, often remaining in private if articulated at all. I would argue that incorporating the trauma narrative into public/governmental memorialisation will almost certainly encounter an innate contradiction: If we recognize that, especially in the wake of violence and suffering, memory narratives cannot be unified or linear, as the trauma label suggests, official representation of memories of violence and suffering cannot be expected to be unified or all-encompassing either. Asserting such a claim would indeed act to suppress certain voices.[12]

Yet another narrative prescription was imposed by the *human rights narrative* (Feldman 2002), which follows a legal logic according to which witnesses can 'restore' their legal body. Following this narrative prescription testifiers were redeemed by relaying stories of suffering before a commission, turning them into citizens of the new nation and allowing them some form of 'closure'. In short, the human rights narrative promises restoration through the combined forces of voice and truth. Far from being an elusive notion, truth here becomes a normative and measurable concept, which could be assessed through the investigative bodies of the commission. As part of a eurocentric discourse the human rights narrative situates violence elsewhere, distancing it from the West and re-enforcing a spectatorial regime in which certain regions become associated with violence and chaos, while the West remains as a power of sanitized rationality (Feldman 2002). Particular local forms of remembering the dead and acknowledging bereavement entered the Commission's work through ululations and other displays of emotional response from the audiences at the hearings. The official narratives broadcast to the public, however, bore little traces of these practices. We can see here that the nationally authorised memory discourse inherently imposed a certain degree of violence, not least because of its insistence on totality and its tendency to marginalize deviant voices.

Memory Politics and the Making of History

The interrelated subjects of truth, representation and history all circle the basic notion of memory. In an anthropological sense, memory is a locus of struggle over epistemological issues, and is seen "as a problematic and perhaps exemplary site for dealing with the complex interlinkage of reality and fantasy in representation and interpretation; the balance between reproduction and representation, or fact and interpretation or recollection and understanding" (Lambek and Antze 1996:xxvii). Memory politics carry substantial political implications, according to Didier Fassin: "history and memory [...] represent the relationship with time through which identities and differences are built" (Fassin 2007:4). He further notes that a common understanding of history and memory has not been successfully established in South African society. Instead the hearings of the TRC have produced a number of sometimes

---

[12] For a very insightful and rather more philosophical view on this tension see Das 2007:38ff.

contradictory versions of events, which have made the emergence of a collective history impossible and in some cases have even worked against the reconstitution of individual stories. At the same time, the granting of amnesty and the insufficiency of material reparations fostered frustrations and disillusionment with the reconciliation process. Even more crucially, as Fassin also notes, “the hearings have demonstrated publicly the impossibility of restoring one common historical truth, and—however honest and sincere the work of the TRC has been—the very notion of shared memory has had to be abandoned.” (ibid. 5). Moreover the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as I argued above, faced inherent problems, as it was embedded in a particular legal context and thus dependent on a specific way of dealing with the past, through which it constructed a certain kind of subjectivity based on a therapeutic logic of catharsis and closure. The TRC operated with a concept of truth as a neutral formation accessible through testimony. Testimonies themselves, however, are increasingly described by scholars in the field as imaginary acts that cannot be called upon to unearth neutral findings, “as far as reality is concerned, psychoanalysis has shown us that the real is woven with the fantasies of the subject and coated with the imaginary” (Morel 2000:113). This insight calls for an opening of the conventional view of speech acts, one that reconsiders the multiple and partial nature of human subjectivity and leaves space for the diversity of personal experience. In her study on women and the TRC, Fiona Ross comes to the conclusion that “[…] the need for a new language of social suffering, one that permits the expression of the full range of experience, admits the integrity of silence, recognises the fragmented and unfinished nature of social recovery, and does not presume closure” (Ross 2003:165). Such a language might acknowledge the propensity to fragmentation and ambiguity involved in facing a violent past, and as such would provide material to draw form in order to understand ways in which experiences of suffering and pain are related to in their aftermath.

Concluding Remarks

I would like to conclude my thoughts by highlighting remembering’s dependence on a central factor of all social life: the imagination. This is especially pertinent when it comes to memories involving pain, suffering and violence, as they are difficult subjects to breach in any fieldwork situations and extremely strenuous to express for the informants. In my research I had recourse to artistic practice and fictionalised knowledge to overcome these obstacles. Indeed, non-realistic modes of representation might be an important medium through which to approach memories of violence, since they focus on finding creative ways to depict the past without subscribing to claims of objectivity and factuality. Advantages of studying memory art (be it literature or artworks) lie in its potential to unveil and articulate inner states of mind that reach beyond historicist realism in order to access an experiential quality. By creating narrative spaces that question dominant frames of meaning imposed by state authorized memory narratives, they can create social spaces for society’s tensions to surface. In conclusion, an engagement with memory in any given society will find it a polyphonic practice within a complex topography of meaning production continually involved in issues of identity formation both for the individual as well as the national consciousness. From a theoretical as well as a methodological viewpoint, anthropologists seem well placed in taking diverse memory practices into account in order to unravel the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic workings of remembering. In other words through careful analysis of memory

cultures and politics we might attempt to understand who can talk about the past, what can be said and, maybe most importantly, what remains silenced.

References

Bernroider, Lucie. 2012. Telling the Truth. An Anthropological Approach to Traumatic Memory in South Africa. Master thesis, University of Vienna.

Colvin, Christopher. 2003. 'Brothers and sisters, do not be afraid of me': Trauma, history and the therapeutic imagination in the new South Africa. In: Hodgkin, Katherine and Susannah Radstone (eds.). Contested pasts. London, pp. 153–167.

Das, Veena. 2007. Life and Words. Berkeley.

Fassin, Didier. 2007. When Bodies Remember. Experiences and Politics of AIDS in South Africa. Berkeley.

Feldman, Allen. 2002. Strange Fruit: The South African Truth Commission and the demonic economies of violence. In: Social Analysis 46 (3), pp. 234–265.

Hodgkin, Katherine and Susannah Radstone (eds.). 2003. Contested Pasts. The Politics of Memory. London.

Lambek, Michael and Paul Antze. 1996. Introduction: Forecasting memory. In: Antze, Paul and Michael Lambek (eds.). Tense Past. Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory. New York and Abingdon, pp. xi–xxxviii.

Morel, Geneviève. 2000. Testimony and the Real (Psychoanalytical Elucidations). In: Kaltenbeck, Franz (ed.). Trauma and Memory. Cross-Cultural Perspectives. Wien, pp. 113–130.

Ross, Fiona. 2003. Bearing Witness. Women and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. London.

Connecting Past and Future—Negotiating Present: Memories and belongings in post-war Sarajevo

Sanda Üllen

Which role do memories of war play on processes of inclusion and exclusion, belonging and identification within a post-conflict society? As memory is not simply a matter of recalling past experiences but "a complex and continuing process of selection, negotiation, and struggle over what will be remembered and what forgotten" (Natzmer 2002:164), it may become a highly politicized and contested issue. Especially in Bosnia-Herzegovina memories are still being (mis)used in order to establish exclusivist national identities and in many publications on the post-Yugoslav wars, history has been presented as an independent variable, leaving the picture of a society clearly divided along lines of national and ethnic affiliation (Jansen 2002; Palmberger 2010; Hayden 2007). In many aspects of social and political life, ethnicity in Bosnia-Herzegovina has been territorialized (Bieber 2006, quoted in Tošić 2009:69) resulting not only in tensions between different ethnic groups but also in a "paradoxical diversity management" which has a "direct impact on all aspects of life: employment, leisure, political activity, the historical image of diversity which is being transmitted to future generations in schools, dealing with war crimes committed in the recent past hence reconciliation, etc." (Tošić 2009:70).

In my PhD-thesis[13] I want to question the dynamic interplay between *what* people remember and forget and *how* this influences and shapes their belongings and identities. As I perceive memory as a process where the individuals set up their life narratives by "selecting and highlighting those experiences that weave a cohesive story about where they have been and where they are headed" (Cattell and Climo 2002:13), I'm especially interested in how young people who experienced the war use memories to (re)negotiate their social ties and (re)localize themselves within new social contexts in a (trans)national context. How are memories created and transmitted within the family, among friends and colleagues? Which role and significance do memories and places have in people's constructions of the past and in coping with the present? And as Anders Stefansson states: "For the locals, there is no doubt: Sarajevo is not, and will never become, the city it once was before the recent war" (Stefansson 2007:59). My intention in the PhD-project is not to retell the history of a nation or a city, but to analyze different patterns of memory narratives in order to show various strategies of how people position themselves towards past events and how they interpret it. In the following paper I will describe and analyze different ways of dealing with the past on the

[13] The methodological approach for the PhD study is based on conduction of in-depth ethnographic fieldwork, including multiple methods, like document analyses (newspapers, reports, literature…), participant observation and narrative interviews. Because the project deals with sensitive issues, like memories of war and displacement, building rapport and careful attention to the context where people interact are important. My personal experiences also have an impact on me and my research, as I was born in Bosnia and position myself as a professional outsider but also an cultural insider at the same time (Halilovich 2011). This issue is constantly reflected upon during the research and the writing process. Until now, two three-months exploratory fieldwork trips to Sarajevo were conducted and in 2014 I will spend the whole year in the city, in order to finish the data collection.

basis of three examples. These are preliminary findings as my PhD project is still work in progress. The entry point of my fieldwork is Sarajevo, the capital of the country, which was under siege for 1425 days, described in the many public speeches and publications as the longest siege of a city in modern military history. Due to the partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina in two entities[14] Sarajevo is also a “divided”[15] city, as one part of it lies within the Federation and the other within the Serb Republic. Also the demographic picture of the city has changed, most of the Orthodox population left the city and the number of Bosnian Muslims has risen up to 78,3% (URL 1). In local narratives about the war the siege of Sarajevo and the city itself play a very prominent role as the siege became a symbol of resistance against the “Barbarians”. Also the beginning of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina is marked with the beginning of the shootings in Sarajevo.

Do you Remember Sarajevo? Remembering with Differences

Nejra, a “Newcomer” in Sarajevo

According to Stefansson the three different socio-cultural dichotomies in Sarajevo – “local/newcomer, urban/rural and ‘cultured’/’non-cultured’ – are interconnected in such way that, ideally, the native, ‘cultured’ locals are opposed to rural newcomers with inferior cultural habits and knowledge” (2007:61). In this categorization which is often articulated by the inhabitants of Sarajevo, Nejra, a 27 year old girl from northern Bosnia, who lived in Munich during the war, is a “newcomer” and a refugee from abroad; that means she wasn’t born in Sarajevo and came to the city after the end of the war. On our long walks through the city or when having a coffee in a crowded café, she always refused to talk to me in German, which she spoke fluently. At the beginning I didn’t mind, because I also had to practice my Bosnian, but after few informal meetings, I asked her “why”? Her answer was that she doesn’t want to talk German in public (or in previous years in school or at the university) because as soon as she spoke German everybody knew that “you were outside”. As she was telling me her story, I started realizing that memory and belonging are two connected issues in the city of Sarajevo, which are grounded upon the questions of inclusion and exclusion beyond ethnic belonging.

The dichotomies mentioned above of urban/rural, local/newcomer received a further dimension: stayee or refugee; and this is further split into being a refugee from Sarajevo or a refugee from other parts of Bosnia. Nejra is a refugee from Northern Bosnia, who first fled to Germany with her parents and then returned to Bosnia (first to a small town in north-west Bosnia, later to Sarajevo). Her parents got their house back in their hometown in the Serb Republic, but don’t want to return there permanently. In Sarajevo, Nejra is faced with double exclusion: she wasn’t in the city during the war and she is a refugee from northern Bosnia – those people are often labeled “papac”, which is pejorative wording for peasant or people coming from the mountains. Her strategy in order to deal with the past is unremembering (Makoni 1998), through silencing and distancing. When her colleagues in the hospital talk

[14] After the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995 the country was divided in two entities and one special district (Brcko). The entities are the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (51% of the territory) and the Serbian Republic (49% of the territory).
[15] There is no visible border, but most of the signs in East-Sarajevo (the Serbian part) are written in Cyrillic alphabet, whereas in other parts of Sarajevo the Latin alphabet is used.

about their experiences during the war she remains silent. When asked where she was, she says she can't remember anymore, because she was still a child then. She thus chooses conscious silencing of the past in order to cope with the legacy. The other strategy Nejra uses is taking a provocative and distancing attitude asking "Why remember? As long as we remember we won't move forward." In that sense "the past is changed or corrected where necessary or left untouched […] (Catell and Climo 2002:15). In distancing herself from the local-official narratives, from the collective victimization and experiences, she also rejects the exclusivist ethnic categorization common in Bosnia. Distancing autobiographical memory from the collective is, according to Jacob Climo, a personal decision which is also used to protect oneself (Climo 2002). Nejra's remembering of the war is still embedded in the longer historical narratives and context, but there are many dissonances within her memories, as Monika Palmberger (2010) also shows for young people in Mostar.

Nejra identifies herself as a Bosnian, a category which does not officially exist in Bosnia. In the constitution of Bosnia there are three constitutive peoples (Bosniaks=Bosnian Muslims, Serbs and Croats), the "Other" (minorities, like the Jewish minority or Roma and Sinti, or persons who refuse to be ethnically categorized) and citizens. As mentioned above, this kind of categorization influences large parts of life: many jobs are given along the so-called "national key" and for that reason, people are sometimes forced to identify themselves even if they do not want to. Not only Nejra, but many other young people who were outside the country declare themselves either as Bosnians or Others. One of the reasons for the rejection of Bosniak is that she learned in school that Bosniak is a pejorative expression for Bosnian Muslims. Nevertheless, many people in Bosnia, especially many academics from the University of Sarajevo are insistent that Bosniak is the right naming of Bosnian Muslims. There are also campaigns like "Vazno je biti Bosnjak" (It is important to be a Bosniak) which propagate that every citizen of Bosnia-Herzegovina is a Bosnian, but that it is important to differentiate between Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats, thus fostering the differences between the different groups.

Armin, Sarajlija[16] in Copenhagen

Armin is a 32-year-old man who was born in Sarajevo but left the city during the war and fled to Denmark, Copenhagen, where he still lives with his Bosnian wife and two children. He visits Sarajevo once a year, mostly in summer. Every year his visits confront him with the fact that he is not seen as a part of Bosnia anymore, because he left the country. The common phrase he often hears is "You are lucky" or "You left the country when it most needed you". This accusation neglects the fact that—similar to Nejra's situation—Armin was a child when the war started but his experiences of flight, displacement and uncertainty are not acknowledged. Thus, although being a born *Sarajlija*, he doesn't share the same memories and experiences as his colleagues who stayed in the city. For Armin, visiting Sarajevo is always accompanied by an inability to reconstruct a sense of belonging to the changed sociocultural environment. Because of the demographic change and attitudes towards him mentioned above, his belonging is formed through memories of place (home or/and objects) before the war. As Halilovich states, "many survivors […] refer to displacement as a memory

[16] Sarajlija is a local word for a person born and living in Sarajevo. Often this word is also connected to the pre-war population of Sarajevo (Stefansson 2007).

of a previous life. Yet, while talking about 'who they are now', they do so in relation to their memories of places, past experiences and social histories" (2011: 43). Thus, Armin always experiences an ambiguity of belonging when visiting the city. His strategy is then one of ambiguous "re-membering" (Myerhoff 1992): on the one hand he overemphasizes his origin of being a *Sarajlija* and highlights the memories of siege of Sarajevo kept over distance through his family (his father stayed behind in the besieged city); and on the other hand he consciously upgrades the mostly pejorative used notion of "Diaspora Bosnian". Thus, he uses his "being outside" not to hide himself and silence the past like Nejra, but to position himself within the transnational context connecting his own experience in Copenhagen with the experience of his father during the siege.

Mirza, Sarajlija in Sarajevo

Mirza is a 28-year-old man who was born in Sarajevo and spent the war in the city. For him "war was the normal thing" and in our talks he always highlighted the adventurous side of the war. In his everyday life memories of the siege become visible every time there is a power cut or no warm water to take a shower. Then he used to say: "It's easy for us who were in the war", because they got used to it. His parents often talk about the war and ask themselves whether they would leave the country if the war started again. His mother always says "no" and Mirza is happy with this answer. He loves the city and was very keen on showing me all the beautiful sites of the city and its inhabitants. In his description of Sarajevo he confirms Stefansson's categorization, stating that *Sarajlije* always perceived their city as "the most urbanized, developed and 'cultured place'" (Stefansson 2007: 61).

As mentioned above, when talking about the past, references to the period "before" and "after the war" are often used to point out the differences and frictions in one's own memories and those retold and transmitted within the family. Yugoslavia is still remembered within families and the story of "good old times" is frequently retold. Young people such as my interview partners are constantly reinterpreting these stories and adapting them to their historical knowledge and experiences. Thus, although acknowledging the peaceful coexistence of different ethnic groups during Yugoslavia, Mirza is very critical and suspicious about the former political system of the country – this is an issue which is rather ignored or marginalized by many persons of older age. According to him "Jugonostalgija" must not be seen as an idealization and romantization of the past, but also as a reaction to the present and commentary on present politics. In contrast to Nejra and Armin, Mirza is a "stayee" and identifies himself as a Bosniak, but at the same time he distances himself from what he calls official narratives that emphasize the differences between the various ethnic groups and the impossibility of living together.

Being and Placing Oneself "Outside"

Having been outside the country or the city during the war relates to the dichotomies refugee/stayee and local/newcomer. This category is demonstrated by the narratives of Nejra and Armin. Nejra is a refugee and a newcomer and she often uses the strategy of unremembering through silencing and distancing herself from the narratives of the war to position herself within her environment. Armin is a local but also a refugee who started highlighting

the fact that he is a "Diaspora Bosnian". He does so by shaping his belongings through mnemonic practices manifested in places and things where memories reside, rather than through local people. *Placing oneself outside* the "official" narrative relates to the dichotomy hegemonial/counter-hegemonial narrative, in which different strategies may be identified, ranging from distancing oneself from the official narratives to highlighting alternative forms of identification (like "Diaspora Bosnian" in the transnational context).

My analysis so far shows that the ways of remembering the war cross-cut the different ethnic categories and that belonging is strongly influenced by lived experiences and transmitted memories of the war. Although all three persons presented here are Bosnian Muslims, they use different strategies to position themselves and deal with their historical experiences and socio-political conditions. Their fragmented memory narratives also cross-cut the homogenous picture often presented by officials and sometimes found in the literature, as mentioned above. Thus, it is very important to closely analyze these different memory-narratives as they show sources of identification that go beyond ethnic affiliation. Still, more ethnographic material is needed to further analyze how people use memories to position themselves along different axes of belonging which may go beyond ethnic affiliations.

References

Bieber, Florian. 2006. Postwar Bosnia. Ethnicity, Inequality and Public Sector Governance. Palgrave.

Cattell, Maria G., and Jacob J. Climo. 2002. Introduction: Meaning in Social Memory and History: Anthropological perspectives. In: Climo, Jacob J. and Maria G. Cattell (eds.). Social Memory and History. Anthropological Perspectives. Walnut Creek, pp. 1–36.

Climo, Jakob J. 2002. Memories and the American Jewish *Aliyah*: Connecting individual and collective experience. In: Climo, Jacob J. and Maria G. Cattell (eds.). Social Memory and History. Anthropological Perspectives. Walnut Creek, pp. 111–127.

Climo, Jakob J. and Maria G. Cattell (eds.). 2002. Social Memory and History. Anthropological Perspectives. Walnut Creek.

Halilovich, Hariz. 2011. Beyond the Sadness: Memories and homecomings among survivors of 'ethnic cleansing' in a Bosnian village. In: Memory Studies 4 (1), pp. 42–52.

Hayden, Robert. 2007. Moral Vision and Impaired Insight: The imagining of other peoples' communities in Bosnia. In: Current Anthropology 48 (1), pp. 105–131.

Jansen, Stef. 2002. The Violence of Memories: Local narratives of the past after ethnic cleansing in Croatia. In: Rethinking History 6 (1), pp. 77–93.

Makoni, Sinfree. 1998. African Languages as European Scripts: The shaping of communal memory. In: Nuttall, Sarah and Carlie Coetzee (eds.). Negotiating the Past. The Making of Memory in South Africa. Cape Town, pp. 242–248.

Myerhoff, Barbara. 1992. Life History among the Elderly: Performance, visibility, and re-membering. In: Kaminsky, Marc (ed). Remembered Lives. The Work of Ritual, Storytelling, and Growing Older. Ann Arbor, pp. 231–247.

Natzmer, Cheryl. 2002. Remembering and Forgetting: Creative expression and reconciliation in post-Pinochet Chile. In: Climo, Jakob J. and Maria G. Cattell (eds.). Social Memory and History. Anthropological Perspectives. Walnut Creek, pp. 161–179.

Palmberger, Monika. 2010. Distancing Personal Experiences from the Collective: Discursive tactics among youth in post-war Mostar. In: L'Europe en Formation 357, pp. 107–124.

Stefansson, Anders. 2007. Urban Exile: Locals, newcomers and the cultural transformation of Sarajevo. In: Bougarel, Xavier, E. Heims and G. Duijzings (eds.). The New Bosnian Mosaic. Identities, Memories and Moral Claims in a Post-war Society. Hampshire, pp. 59–78.

Tošić, Jelena. 2009. 'Diversity' in the Balkans: Balkanism, anthropological approaches to the state, and the political realities of the contemporary Balkans. In: Managing Migration? The Politics of Truth and Life Itself, Irish Journal of Anthropology 12 (3), pp. 108–118.

URL 1: http://www.sarajevo.ba/en/stream.php?kat=142, accessed November 7, 2013

Remembering Oslo: Background to a research project on young Palestinian migrants

Eva Kössner

In this paper I want to give an idea about my ongoing PhD research, which focuses on remembering processes and commemorative practices of young Palestinian migrants. Theoretically, the research is based on two socio-anthropological insights: Firstly, the treatment of remembering as simple recalling of past events does not suffice to address the multiple ways in which people constantly organise past experiences and learned contents from current positions and for present day purposes. Therefore, each act of remembering is seen as a complex process of reconstruction (Cattell and Climo 2002) taking place in a particular temporal, spatial and social setting. These settings may not only have the power to evoke forgotten memories but, as Liisa Malkki (1995) points out, form the actual basis for the processes of memory (re)production. Maurice Bloch (1992) goes even further in arguing that the cultural and historical context of individuals shapes their actual notion of time and the ways they place and construct themselves within the past and consequently also within the future. In this regard, memories do not only exist as ideas about the past, which are socially constructed, negotiated, suppressed or revised. Memories also deeply enter everyday life in the present, for instance by shaping and structuring ongoing social relationships (Das 2007). The many different products that may arise out of particular remembering processes can be seen as representations of the past (Tonkin 1992), whose multiplicity considerably exceeds verbal narratives (Bloch 1993) and contests ideas of a single history. However, these representations always contain aspects of shared concepts, which are constantly recontextualised as required—collective ideas, expectations, strategies, and practices, which can often be tracked over wide distances and long periods of time (Halbwachs 2006 [1925]); Assmann 1992).

In our present-day world, and that is the second premise, the settings in which people are constantly reconstructing their life-worlds through remembering are often fractured, interlinked and deterritorialised (Appadurai 1991). Although these dynamics are a global phenomenon and comprise more or less sedentary persons as well, they particularly affect highly mobile individuals and groups (subsumed under terms as different to the core as migrants, refugees or mobile global elite). My PhD research takes this up as it focuses on young Palestinians who grew up in the West Bank during the Oslo Accords in the 1990s but are now living outside the Palestinian Territories. Often their migration isn't a process with a clear beginning and a definite end, as a number of them have even already lived in different local and national contexts. Because of that, and also because many Palestinian families are scattered around the globe today[17], these young migrants are usually not only connected to their places of origin in the Occupied Territories and the local communities in their current country of residence. They often have incorporated several national contexts into their everyday life and are themselves part of transnational flows by crossing borders, sending goods and money or transferring

[17] Due to flight, migration and occupation, Palestinians are living in very heterogeneous contexts since the middle of the 20th century. Besides the almost five million Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel, there exists an even larger diaspora today, mainly in other Middle Eastern countries, the Americas and Europe.

ideas (for example about past experiences of violence or the ongoing fight for national self-determination and independence) across the globe. By this they establish and maintain transnational social spaces or fields (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994), which are not only “dense sets of ties reaching beyond and across the borders of sovereign states” (Faist 2000:197) but constitute “pluri-local frames of reference which structure everyday practices, social positions, employment trajectories and biographies, and human identities […]” (Pries 2001:69). My research aims to examine how reconstructions of meanings, which are at work during remembering processes, take place within these kinds of transnational social spaces resulting from migration experiences. Building on this, the influence trans-national networks and flows of persons, capital, goods and ideas are exerting on these processes of reconstruction should be revealed.[18]

The Oslo Accords: History and Implications

Among the many essential events of the Palestinian past, the younger history is dominated by the First and the Second Intifada[19] as well as the so-called Oslo Accords in-between—a period, which is of immense importance for the present generations but still often under-estimated in scientific as well as public discourse.

Starting in 1987 and ending officially with the Oslo Accords in 1993, the First Intifada covers a period of approximately six years of exceptionally strong resistance against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The reasons for this uprising lay in the ongoing military occupation of the remaining Palestinian Territories, the related coercive measures and the lack of political prospects at that time. Resistance was expressed mainly through mass demonstrations and economic means like the boycott of Israeli products or the refusal to pay any taxes to the occupying power. This first Intifada changed the position of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) towards the two-state-solution (Hammami and Tamari 2000:3) and in conjunction with other regional and international developments it led to the Madrid conference in 1991. This conference did not yet include direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians but empowered Palestinians in the international arena. Additionally, the conference made the diversity within Palestinian politics visible as representatives of the PLO, at that time situated in exile in Tunis, were excluded and only Palestinians from the Occupied Territories were allowed to take part. The Madrid conference was followed by 20 months of bilateral talks in Washington, which did not succeed for

---

[18] Methodologically, this is done by applying a mixture of different tools of data collection and analysis. Primarily, together with the consultation and analysis of selected primary and secondary sources, ethnographic fieldwork in different, transnationally linked local places and transnational fields should open up the contexts in which young transnationally linked Palestinian migrants are remembering the Oslo years today. In the sense of multi-sited research (Marcus 1995; Falzon 2009) the primary starting points are Vienna, Austria, and Amman, Jordan. As the focus lies on the multitude of social practices of memory production, there are not only examined local activities within newly adopted diasporic surroundings, but also transnational movements and the usage of recent tools of information and communication technology through which ideas are reproduced transnationally on a daily basis. In addition, as particular “media of remembering” (Gudehus, Eichenberg and Welzer 2010), personal narratives of the Oslo years are examined treating them as specific verbal representations of past experiences.

[19] *Intifāḍa* means “uprising” or “shaking off” and refers to two periods of intensive Palestinian resistance against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

various reasons. Parallel to these official negotiations, in 1993 secret talks got under way in Oslo—for the first time directly between Israel and the PLO. These negotiations, which lasted for eight months, led to the so-called Oslo Accords (Shlaim 2010).

What is usually referred to as the Oslo Accords entails two main and some additional agreements (all with numerous annexes) that should in fact only regulate an interim period of five years. According to the "Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements"[20] (1993), also called "Oslo I", Israeli forces should be withdrawn from selected areas and responsibilities in several fields gradually be transferred to a newly established Palestinian Authority (PA). In the course of the "Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip" (1995), also referred to as "Oslo II", self-administration and cooperation was expanded and the West Bank was divided into three zones: Area A includes all main Palestinian urban centers and is under complete control of the Palestinian Authority. Area B is under joint competence of Palestinians and Israelis. And Area C is controlled completely by Israel, whereby main parts (the future of settlement areas and special military zones was left open) should have been ceded gradually. Yet, up until the present day this division still persists with very few modifications and is the main cause for the current territorial fragmentation of the West Bank. The Oslo Accords did not lead to the so-called final status negotiations and in the light of ongoing restrictions and the sharp increase of Israeli settlements, frustration among Palestinians grew constantly and culminated in the outbreak of the Second Intifada in the year 2000.[21]

The various agreements subsumed under the term Oslo Accords were criticised from Israeli as well as Palestinian perspectives. One of the main points of criticism is that the essential issues like the future status of Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees or Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories were not touched upon but postponed until forthcoming negotiations about the final status. Moreover, the differentiated system of taxation, which allows Israel to use collected funds to apply pressure on the Palestinian Authority, the special rights Israeli settlers enjoy in the West Bank and the far-reaching power of the Israeli military system under the pretext of security were codified with the Accords. What is important here is that the Oslo Accords did not only affect the relation between Israel and the Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories. They deeply influenced local Palestinian society as a whole and also the Palestinian national movement, which should be shown hereafter on the basis of several points: First of all, the newly implemented authority mainly comprised PLO-elites returning from exile, which resulted in new fault lines and oppositions within local society (Bisharat 1997; Hilal 2006b), because, for example, local Palestinians who had been fighting against the occupation during the First Intifada were marginalised (Bowman 1999).[22] Moreover, increasingly fractured groups were emerging also within local society, as people were integrated into the Palestinian Authority—and consequently profiting from it—to different degrees (Collins 2004).

---

[20] All documents available on the Website of the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs (URL 1).

[21] The end of the Second Intifada (*intifāḍat al-aqṣā*) is not marked exactly and actually a point of dispute. Some emphasise that it never really ended but just calmed down.

[22] Palestinians living in the diaspora were marginalised as well, as the Oslo Accords brought on the successive replacement of the PLO by the Palestinian Authority (Bishara 2008). As Salim Tamari (2003) explains, this marginalisation also took place on an ideological level, as the remaining parts of historical Palestine gained in significance regarding nation building and identity formation—not only on the cost of Palestinians living in exile but also of Israeli Palestinians, namely those who remained in Israel after the Nakba and their successors.

In conjunction with the Palestinian Authority a new form of civil administration was implemented, which heavily affected the local living conditions. One of the most far-reaching changes was the newly adopted territorial division mentioned above, which lead to a strong socio-economic fragmentation within the West Bank and complicated the handling of individual formal affairs, due to the pluralisation of responsible authorities depending on the place of residence. Thus, although some urban regions were enjoying positive developments at times, the economic situation as a whole got worse—not only because of the increasing dependency on international donor aid in the course of the Oslo Accords, but because of the ongoing Israeli control over Palestinian mobility, trade and huge parts of their land and the resulting negative influences (Farsakh 2010). As Adam Hanieh (2002) points out, this worsening of living conditions is also related to the decline of working possibilities for Palestinians in Israel in the first years of the Oslo accords and during the Second Intifada. Moreover the aggressive neoliberal policy adopted by the Palestinian Authority in the last years increased poverty (Hanieh 2008). Overall importance is attached to stability to guarantee the free flow of capital and goods, which intensifies social stratification in the form of the emergence of a new "national bourgeoisie" and the marginalisation and fragmentation of the working class (Hilal 2003).

In addition, the establishment of the Palestinian Authority and the integration of the local population into a new administration system led to the weakening of civil society and a new kind of NGO-isation, which encompasses the dominance of specific themes like development or gender (Hammami and Tamari 2000:12). Together, international human rights institutions and the manifold NGOs form a kind of human rights regime that works through national layers but also acts independently from them insofar as it spreads specific underlying value-systems. This has facilitated claims for individual rights on the cost of the possibilities of acclamation for national liberation. Young Palestinians consider the role of international NGOs quite critically—especially regarding their orientation, financing and influence on Palestinian society (Kössner 2011:115).

Young Palestinian Migrants Remembering Oslo

These various processes during the 1990s particularly influenced those Palestinians who grew up at that time, since young people have usually not yet found or fostered their positions in society. This generation, who is now in its thirties, was especially targeted by silencing strategies employed by the Israeli occupation power as well as by the Palestinian Authority (Sharek Youth Forum 2009:7–8). A part of these young Palestinians growing up during the Oslo years in the Occupied Territories have emigrated temporarily or permanently during or after the subsequent Second Intifada for various reasons, including work, marriage or studies. Migrational flows of that kind strongly depend on dispositions like class, gender or already existing family networks (Hilal 2003)[23], which makes emigration from Palestine not an individual project but a "household or family affair" (Taraki 2006:xxiii).

[23] Emigration patterns changed in the 1990s due to Oslo Accords and the Gulf war, changing especially the role of class position and the destination of migration. In general, the relatively high emigration rates out of the Occupied Territories diminished during the first years of the Oslo Accords, just for rising again in the subsequent period because of the ongoing bad living conditions (Hilal 2006a).

Although the burden of the ongoing Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is by no means distributed equally, Palestinians share the experience of the decades-long conflict with Israel across borders. These circumstances entail specific processes of memory (re)production, which have to be kept in mind while studying memory among Palestinians wherever they may be situated. For instance, the fact that "for Palestinians […] the past is neither distant nor over" can limit the abilities to speak about painful experiences (Abu-Lughod and Sa'di 2007:10). Or, it lets people see recent eruptions of violence in the light of painful ones in the past, above all the Nakba[24], and might cause specific forms of agency in memory work which are expressed, for example, in an increased urge to document injustice (Jayyusi 2007). The ongoing experience of violence may also produce representations of memories reflecting quite different layers—ranging from collective aspects of memory to painful recollections handed down within families, as well as individual memories of self-experienced violence or notions of present restrictions (Kössner 2013).

What can be said from preliminary investigations is that regarding young Palestinian migrants and their memories of the years of the Oslo-Accords there are many heterogeneous processes to be observed and quite contradictory narratives to be examined. The reasons for this can be found in the specific temporal and spatial characteristics of the field of research: Before Oslo the PLO had an important role in the unification of "a 'national-popular' past" (Swedenburg 1991:158), a kind of unified national history. But today, the Palestinian political landscape appears to be more substantially fractured—not only since the open struggle between the two main parties Fateh and Hamas. Because of that, quite competitive national narratives are expressed openly today and collective and individual practices of commemoration got more complex. In addition, the newly gained rights to at least a part of national territory in the course of the Oslo Accords released the burden of constantly proclaiming a unified national past (Hill 2005). Moreover, in comparison with other historical events, the Oslo Accords have a quite controversial position within the Palestinian national past. While the fundamental fronts during the Nakba were more or less undisputed, the negotiations following the Madrid conference in 1991 and the subsequent Oslo Accords were judged differently already at that time. Especially among young people who witnessed the First Intifada it is very common to contrast the remembered unity during their struggle before the negotiations of the 1990s with the subsequent social fragmentation (Collins 2004). The various perspectives towards the Oslo period are reproduced on a daily basis up to the present, as the main outcomes, such as the Palestinian Authority or the territorial fragmentation, persist. Thus, varying events of day-to-day politics and the appreciation of them from positions of individual political affiliations are reflected in the expressions of memories of this period.

Another particularity of the field of research lies in the chosen group of people. Young Palestinians who are (temporarily) living abroad are integrated in various communities and are used to acting in different local and cultural contexts, which does not only imply that they are confronted with multiple narratives influenced by different discursive contexts. These local contexts form the basis for the processes of reconstructing meanings and may entail differing perceptions and conceptions. The resulting ideas about the past can be intertwined with present experiences and strategies and may function as a framework for the interpretation

[24] *An-Nakba* means "the catastrophe" and terms the violent events in the course of the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, which culminated on the Palestinian side in the loss of main parts of historic Palestine and high flows of refugees.

of present life-worlds, whereby the extent to which this takes place also depends on the very context (Malkki 1995). Moreover, the young Palestinians in the focus of the research are living, acting and remembering transnationally. Their activities particularly encompass the usage of recent tools of transnational communication for staying connected to Palestinians as well as to Palestine as a complex of national ideas (Lindholm Schulz and Hammer 2003). In this regard, the World Wide Web, satellite television or mobile phones open up new spaces for commemorative practices. These spaces are per se challenging traditional distinctions of private and public or popular and national, but are nevertheless emerging from local contexts and as such are influenced by cultural, social and political aspects of various kinds.

Outlook

These various aspects—and there are only a few that could be mentioned here—give an idea about the multiple circumstances in which young Palestinian migrants are remembering the Oslo years today. They grew up in Palestine at a time of great political and socio-economic changes, which influence their perception of and interaction with the surroundings in which they are acting and remembering in their present day lives. These transnationally connected life-worlds shape their memories in turn, as they provide the main framework for everyday remembering practices. In today's globalised world, multi-layered and interlaced remembering processes of this kind are common for millions of people moving across borders and connecting different places, but—to finish with Ted Swedenburg—in particular "[t]he Palestinian situation requires that we conceive of memory as a multidimensional, displaced, and local-global construction" (2003:xxix). What shapes representations of memories are taking in the described context and what dynamics are involved in their (re)production remains to be seen.

References

Abu-Lughod, Lila, and Ahmad H. Sa'di. 2007. Introduction. In: Sa'di, Ahmad H. and Lila Abu-Lughod (eds.). Nakba. Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory. New York, pp. 1–24.

Appadurai, Arjun. 1991. Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and queries for a transnational Anthropology. In: Fox, Richard (ed.). Recapturing Anthropology. Working in the Present. Santa Fe, pp. 191–210.

Assmann, Jan. 1992. Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen. München.

Basch, Linda, Nina Glick Schiller and Christina Szanton Blanc. 1994. Nations Unbound. Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States. Langhorne.

Bishara, Amahl. 2008. Watching Television from the Palestinian Street: The media, the state and representational interventions. In: Cultural Anthropology 23 (3), pp. 488–530.

Bisharat, George E. 1997. Exile to Compatriot: Transformations in the social identity of Palestinian refugees in the West Bank. In: Gupta, Akhil and James Ferguson (eds.). Culture, Power, Place. Explorations in Critical Anthropology. Durham and London, pp. 203–233.

Bloch, Maurice E. F. 1992. Internal and External Memory: Different ways of being in history. In: Suomen Anthropologi 17 (1) [republished in Bloch, Maurice E. F. 1998. How Do We Think They Think. Anthropological Approaches to Cognition, Memory, and Literacy. Boulder and Oxford, pp. 67–84].

——— 1993. Time, Narratives and the Multiplicity of Representations of the Past. In: Bulletin of the Institute of Ethnology Academia Sinica 75, pp. 29–45 [republished in Bloch, Maurice E. F. 1998. How Do We Think They Think. Anthropological Approaches to Cognition, Memory, and Literacy. Boulder and Oxford, pp. 100–113].

Bowman, Glenn. 1999. The Exile Imagination: The construction of the landscape of Palestine from its outside. In: Abu-Lughod, Ibrahim, Roger Heacock and Khaled Nashef (eds.). The Landscape of Palestine. Equivocal Poetry. Birzeit, pp. 53–77.

Cattell, Maria G., and Jacob J. Climo. 2002. Introduction: Meaning in Social Memory and History: Anthropological perspectives. In: Climo, Jacob J. and Maria G. Cattell (eds.). Social Memory and History. Anthropological Perspectives. Walnut Creek, pp. 1–36.

Collins, John. 2004. Occupied by Memory. The Intifada Generation and the Palestinian State of Emergency. New York and London.

Das, Veena. 2007. Life and Words. Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary. Berkeley and Los Angeles.

Faist, Thomas. 2000. The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Spaces. Oxford.

Falzon, Mark-Anthony (ed.). 2009. Multi-Sited Ethnography. Theory, Praxis and Locality in Contemporary Research. Farnham and Burlington.

Farsakh, Leila. 2010. Revisiting the Palestinian Economy after 40 Years of Israeli Occupation: Present economic realities and future challenges. In: Wiener Institut für Dialog und Zusammenarbeit (ed.). Perspectives beyond War and Crisis II. Food Aid, Poverty Administraion and Development Policy in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Conference Report. Wien, pp. 17–37.

Gudehus, Christian, Ariane Eichenberg and Harald Welzer (eds.). 2010. Gedächtnis und Erinnerung. Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch. Stuttgart and Weimar.

Halbwachs, Maurice. 2006 [1925]. Das Gedächtnis und seine sozialen Bedingungen. Frankfurt/Main.

Hammami, Rema, and Salim Tamari. 2000. Anatomy of Another Rebellion. In: Middle East Report 217, pp. 2–15.

Hanieh, Adam. 2002. Class, Economy, and the Second Intifada. In: http://monthlyreview.org/2002/10/01/class-economy-and-the-second-intifada, accessed March 7, 2013.

——— 2008. Palestine in the Middle East: Opposing neoliberalism and US power. In: http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2008/hanieh190708a.html, accessed March 7, 2013.

Hilal, Jamil. 2003. Problematizing Democracy in Palestine. In: Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East 23 (1&2), pp. 163–172.

——— 2006a. Emigration, Conservatism, and Class Formation in West Bank and Gaza Strip Communities. In: Taraki, Lisa (ed.). Living Palestine. Family Survival, Resistance, and Mobility under Occupation. Syracuse, pp. 185–230.

——— 2006b. An-niẓām as-siyāsī al-filasṭīnī baʿd Ūslū. Dirāsa taḥlīlīa naqdīya. Rām Allāh and Bayrūt.

Hill, Tom. 2005. Historicity and the Nakba Commemorations of 1998. EUI Working Paper RSCAS 2005/33. European University Institute, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, Mediterranean Programme Series.

Jayyusi, Lena. 2007. Iterability, Cumulativity, and Presence: The relational figures of Palestinian memory. In: Sa’di, Ahmad H. and Lila Abu-Lughod (eds.). Nakba. Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory. New York, pp. 107–133.

Kössner, Eva. 2011. Ramallah zwischen Alltag und Besatzung. Binnenmigration, soziales Leiden und Kreativität in Palästina 2010. Diplomarbeit, Universtität Wien.

——— 2013. Unterwegs nach Ramallah: Junge PalästinenserInnen zwischen Ausdauer, Widerstand und Kreativität. In: Six-Hohenbalken, Maria Anna (ed.). Aufwachsen im Ausnahmezustand. Sozialanthropologische Beiträge über Adoleszenz in Unsicherheit und Gewalt. Wien, pp. 25–46.

Lindholm Schulz, Helena, and Juliane Hammer. 2003. The Palestinian Diaspora. Formation of Identities and Politics of Homeland. London.

Malkki, Liisa Helena. 1995. Purity and Exile. Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania. Chicago and London.
Marcus, George E. 1995. Ethnography in/of the World System: The emergence of multi-sited ethnography. In: Annual Review of Anthropology 24, pp. 95–117.
Pries, Ludger. 2001. The Disruption of Social and Geographic Space: Mexican-US migration and the emergence of transnational social spaces. In: International Sociology 16 (1), pp. 55–74.
Sharek Youth Forum (ed.). 2009. Promise or Peril? The Status of Youth in Palestine. Ramallah.
Shlaim, Avi. 2010. Israel and Palestine. Reappraisals, Revisions, Refutations. London and New York.
Swedenburg, Ted. 1991. Popular Memory and the Palestinian National Past. In: O'Brien, William J. a. R. (ed.). Golden Ages, Dark Ages. Imagining the Past in History and Anthropology. Berkeley, pp. 152–179.
——— 2003. Memories of Revolt. The 1936–1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past. Minneapolis.
Tamari, Salim. 2003. Bourgeois Nostalgia and the Abandoned City. In: Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East 23 (1&2), pp. 173–180.
Taraki, Lisa. 2006. Introduction. In: Taraki, Lisa (ed.). Living Palestine. Family Survival, Resistance, and Mobility under Occupation. Syracuse, pp. xi–xxx.
Tonkin, Elizabeth. 1992. Narrating our Pasts. The Social Construction of Oral History. New York.

URL 1: http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/peace%20process/reference%20documents, accessed March 7, 2013.

Experiences from the Field: Nablus under siege and occupation

Noura Kamal

In this paper I will describe the experiences I went through during my fieldwork which took place in the City of Nablus in Palestine. I will focus on how, despite the preparations a researcher may take before starting his/her journey, many obstacles may arise unexpectedly, especially when conducting fieldwork in conflict areas. Consequently, the researcher should be aware about using suitable methodologies in order to gain a preliminary understanding of the social and political context, otherwise the researcher will encounter various difficulties in obtaining the accurate and relevant data.

Field work is a core aspect in my PhD project, as it aims to analyze and compare the urban population of the Palestinian city of Nablus under two recent military conditions, namely those of immediate siege and of regular occupation[25]. Through different methods of ethnographic inquiry, behavioral patterns of specific urban sub-groups, which can be identified mainly in the old city of Nablus and which were living under these two conditions of conflict can be assessed and interpreted.

Nablus City and the Occupation

Nablus is one of the most famous and oldest cities of Palestine. At a distance of 63 km north of Jerusalem/al-Quds, Nablus is located between two mountains, Gerzim and Ebal. The Roman Emperor Titus founded the city in 72 AD in honor of his father Flavius Vespasian, and was denominated Flavia Neapolis, the "New City" (URL 1). Being close to many key areas (like Jerusalem, Yafa, the Galilee, Syria, Jordan) Nablus was given an important role during the history of the holy land and its different rulers (Egypt, Ottoman Empire, British mandate) (URL 2). In addition, Nablus is also famous for the Samaritan community living in the Gerzim Mt. nearby. "This is one of the smallest minorities in the World. Most of them live in the City of Nablus in Palestine as a small minority with a main interest to survive, and to reserve its identity and heritage, the Samaritans do their best to keep their neutrality and good relations with all powers and factions in the region. In addition to that, the Samaritans in Nablus are in harmony with the Palestinian society". (Yousef and Barghouti 2005; Doumani 1995).

Today, Nablus city is under Israeli occupation and surrounded by eleven settlements inhabited by 11,809 Jewish-Israeli settlers. (URL 3). According to all valid rulings by international law, these settlements have to be viewed as illegal. This combines with a correspondingly strong

[25] Immediate siege: An extreme situation when the Israeli army forced all the people in the city in 2002 to stay in their homes, and no one was allowed to leave his/her home or s/he would be shot and killed. Regular occupation: A long brutal condition since 1967, where people live under the occupation of a hostile army, which controls many aspects of everyday-life.

Israeli military presence in the vicinity of such settlements. Nablus is confronted with high demographic growth: the current number of its population is given as 328,603 (URL 4), which includes large numbers of refugees residing inside and around the camps after Al-Nakbah[26] in 1948.

Before the outbreak of the latest intifada in 2000, Nablus used to be the most important city for the Palestinian economy, but today its economy has been damaged greatly due to the deteriorating effects of the Israeli occupation (URL 5). The unemployment rate in the labor force in the Palestinian Territory is 15.6% (URL 6).

In 2002, Israel re-invaded the city destroying its infrastructure and killing and injuring many innocent people. During this invasion, Nablus was put under curfew for the duration of three consecutive months. These months were one of the worst phases in the city's history. In many ways, the inhabitants faced physical and psychological trauma confirming a statement by the anthropologist Talal Asad: "the category of torture is no longer limited to applications of physical pain: it now includes psychological coercion employing disorientation, isolation, and brainwashing" (Asad 1997:297). During that time no one was allowed to peek from the window, let alone leave their houses without taking the risk of being shot dead by Israeli soldiers. Still, the people of the city did not put their lives on hold, they developed creative ways to cope with this situation finding new ways of living under the siege—in ways the Israeli army could not see. They went to their shops and offices while everything seemed to be closed and they worked undercover inside the buildings. Even while schools were closed teachers and parents created new ways of teaching: each neighborhood gathered its children in a building, where the teachers living closest took over instructing those school students. This was called "popular education", because it took place outside the reach of regular schools. These are just a few amongst many examples of how the people of Nablus created new ways of everyday living while facing the devastations inflicted by the Israeli army.

Experiences in the Field

To carry out such a study it was necessary to focus on a geographical space inside the city of Nablus that reflects the cultural survival techniques and different practices of survival under the Israeli military siege. Therefore, my research focused on the "old city", not only due to its historical value, but most importantly due to the fact that during the siege its inhabitants suffered the most in comparison to other areas in Nablus. The Old City was the Israeli military's main target as they sought to obliterate its history by destroying its historical buildings. The approach used by the Israeli army in attacking the old city led to its separation and isolation from the wider urban environment and it was not easy to enter or exit without risking one's life. It is critical to comprehend, that the old city is the core of its urban population and history, the city and its inhabitants gradually spread outside from the historical centre into the mountains of Gerzim and Ebal, and other territories in between. If we search the people's origins outside the old city and their ancestries, we will find that they have roots in the old city, and many houses are still denominated according to family names.

[26] A year that is called Al-Nakba which is a Palestinian term meaning Catastrophe. It is indicative of Palestinians who were forced to leave their homes in 1948.

Access Gates to the Community

When I started my fieldwork in summer 2012 I decided to communicate and establish contact with two main Palestinian humanitarian organizations: (1) The Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS), and (2) The Palestinian Medical Relief Society (PMRS), as they represent important links to reach the people I wanted to study. Through multiple projects, they interacted with the people during both phases: Nablus under siege and Nablus under regular occupation, which are the basis of my study. The PMRS was my entry point to start my field work, as I had worked with this organization as a volunteer during 2002 where we were communicating with the people who were suffering and needed help. I believed that the humanitarian Palestinian organizations were a good gate to initiate communication with the families in the city and thereafter those families would introduce me to other families within their network. However, ten years had passed since the invasion and many things had changed. Among those changes, were the projects implemented by these humanitarian organizations. They were no longer communicating with the people at the same deep level as they used to during the Israeli invasion. Due to these new realities, penetrating the lives of the old city through those organizations was a dead end, and I had to find another approach. I discussed this with my supervisor Prof. Andre Gingrich, he told me to “Be patient”. This advice, despite its simplicity, was an important key to finding other means of entering the field. It is not about rushing to get all the information you need, it is about being patient when entering the field and communicating with the people and most importantly building trustful relationships. Starting with this spirit can help the researcher move forward, keeping in mind that it is important to communicate with other colleagues who are far away from the field to keep this spirit high. It would be difficult to continue doing fieldwork with no external moral support.

I went to the Palestinian Medical Relief Committee to ask them to join their institution as a volunteer and explained my project to them. They told me that they had stopped working with programs that reflect the daily interaction between them and the people from the city. After a long discussion, they suggested two social institutions located in the middle of the old city of Nablus:

1. Multipurpose Community Resource Centre (MCRC): A Non-Governmental Organization; its aim is to help the people of Nablus through different activities based on their needs. It was established in 1998.
2. Civilian Society of Nablus Governorate (CSNG): Established in 2000 at the outset of the second intifada. It provides different types of humanitarian aid and services.

Of these two institutions, the first one in particular was the main point of entry to communicate with the people and to interview and observe them at the institution and in their homes when they invited me to come to their place. From this point onwards, it was like a domino effect in entering the lives of many others, as many women introduced me to other women in their neighborhood and were extremely cooperative.

In addition to these two institutions, the Nablus Municipality Library was a major introduction to both critical archives as well as getting the chance to interact with the employees. They offered their assistance and introduced me to a woman from the old city that I accompanied frequently in her daily life and who showed me the old city in depth. As you can conclude, until that point most of the people I met were women, as I found it difficult to get the opportunity to interview and observe the life style of the men due to the conservative

environment of the old city. Therefore, I communicated with a group of men from different backgrounds who gathered each night, sitting in front of my father's work, near the old city. That was the only way I was able to spend time with men, by joining their gathering each night which was indeed a helpful point of access to the male world.

Depending on these four gates which were the primary access to interact with the people in Nablus city, I overrode a main obstacle of how to enter the field. With the help offered by the MRCP and the advice by my supervisor, family and friends, I had multiple gates of access to the daily lives of the people in Nablus city. Not forgetting the importance of the preparation before starting the fieldwork—I studied and read previous literature about fieldwork which helped me keep on track during the actual research process (Agar 1980; Gingrich 2012a, 2012b). In their useful publication, Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz and Linda Shaw (2011), provide several tools that can assist novice researchers in writing their fieldnotes in a structured and comprehensive manner.

Being a Native Researcher

A further challenge was being a native researcher, as it can be confusing and can lead to internal fears. We should always remember that the researcher's experience in the field as a native anthropologist is totally unique and the literature written about it and about the process of fieldwork will always be a supportive tool (Narayan 1993; Nordstrom and Robben 1995). At the beginning I was confused about what notes to take during my observations. Then, I decided to jot down all my observations which I could reorganize and filter later on.

Additionally, one of the major obstacles of being a native researcher is to be objective towards the discussions and observations he or she gathers during the fieldwork, especially if the researcher has experienced the same situation that s/he is studying. Being in this situation might reveal inner struggles in dealing with memories which are hard to remember and the ability to create a distance between the researcher and his/her project.

I experienced the siege in Ramallah as well as in Nablus. It was not easy to recall those memories and continuously listen to the different stories of others. Nevertheless, the belief that one's work reflects a higher purpose through the documentation of the experiences and stories of my target group, strengthens the researcher and helps him/her to move forward and give the maximum effort possible.

On the other hand, being a native also has several advantages: Firstly, it facilitates entry to the field, secondly, the researcher is equipped with the deep understanding of the external and internal social and political context, and thirdly, the researcher has a deep understanding of the inner meaning of the language and the linguistic expressions which would be hard to understand if the researcher were an outsider.

The Analysis Phase

Analyzing the collected data and information is a critical part of any research. Thinking of the best way to analyze months of daily work may lead the researcher to feel lost if s/he is not careful about the methods s/he will use. My data is in Arabic, and it was hard to use programs

such as: (1) ATLAS: Qualitative Software, or (2) MAXQDA – Qualitative Data Analysis software. I thought it would be better to devise my own technique of analysis. After reading the basics about "Grounded Theory Coding" from different resources (e.g., Charmaz 2006), I devised excel sheets which I used to analyze the information that I had gathered during the fieldwork.

Final Remarks

During the research process, I found that the researcher ought to be aware of the deeper understanding of his/her own data, and create a profound connection to his/her project. We must bear in mind that what we are doing as researchers is not just collecting data, it is more than that; it is about the stories of people who experience the hard life and struggle to overcome all of these unbearable memories. It raises the sentiment that you are communicating with the spirits of those people and that it is not only a project you go through.

References

Agar, Michael. 1980. The Professional Stranger. An Informal Introduction to Ethnography. London.
Asad, Talal. 1997. On Torture, or Cruel, Inhuman, and Degrading Treatment. In: Kleinman, Arthur, Veena Das and Margaret Lock (eds.). Social Suffering. London, pp. 285–308.
Charmaz, Kathy. 2006. Constructing Grounded Theory. A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis. California.
Doumani, Beshara. 1995. Rediscovering Palestine. Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700–1900. Berkeley.
Emerson, Robert, Rachel Fretz and Linda Shaw. 2011. Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes. Chicago and London.
Gingrich, Andre. 2012a. Comparative Methods in Socio-Cultural Anthropology Today. In: Fardon, Richard et al. (eds.). The SAGE Handbook of Social Anthropology, Vol. 2. London, pp. 201–214.
——— 2012b. Methodology. In: Carrier, James G. and Deborah B. Gewertz (eds.). Handbook of Sociocultural Anthropology. London and New York, pp. 107–124.
Narayan, Kirin. 1993. How Native Is a "Native" Anthropologist? In: American Anthropologist 95 (3), pp. 671–686.
Nordstrom, Carolyn and Antonious Robben (eds.). 1995. Fieldwork Under Fire. Contemporary Studies of Violence and Survival. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London.
Yousef, Hussein and Iyad Barghouti. 2005. Minority Under Occupation: The socio politics of the Samaritans in the Palestinian Occupied Territories. In: http://www.zajel.org/article_view.asp?newsID=4429&cat=18

URL 1: http://www.atlastours.net/holyland/nablus.html, accessed May 2011.
URL 2: http://www.palestineremembered.com/GeoPoints/Nablus_1447/Article_2519.html, accessed June 2011.
URL 3: http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_PCBS/Downloads/book1661.pdf, accessed April 2011.
URL 4: http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_PCBS/Downloads/book1749.pdf, accessed April 2011.
URL 5: http://www.palestineremembered.com/GeoPoints/Nablus_1447/Article_2519.html, accessed April 2011.
URL 6: http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Default.aspx?tabID=1&lang=en, accessed April 2011.

Authors and Editors

Lucie Bernroider, M.A., studied Social and Cultural Anthropology and Political Science at the University of Vienna, from which she graduated with distinction. Her PhD project took her to the Cluster of Excellence “Asia and Europe in a Global Context” at the University of Heidelberg and she is part of an EU funded HERA project on single women in Asian cities. Her project aims at documenting strategies of urban protest culture and emerging notions of gender, freedom and access to urban space within the neo-liberal context of Delhi. Bernroider’s further research interests include media anthropology, political anthropology, colonialism and studies on violence and social memory.

Noura Kamal, M.A., is a researcher at the Institute for Social Anthropology, Austrian Academy of Sciences, and a PhD student at the Department of Cultural and Social Anthropology of the University of Vienna. Her thesis is about the scopes of agency in Nablus (Palestine) under immediate siege and under regular occupation. Social suffering and resistance are main topics in her work. She graduated from Birzeit University in Palestine with a master’s degree in Sociology, having completed her master thesis “The Effects of the Practices of Student Movements at Birzeit University on Palestinian Social Structure: a Comparative Study between the First and the Second Intifada.”

Eva Kössner, MMag.[a], is a doctoral student at the Department of Cultural and Social Anthropology of the University of Vienna. Currently she is Junior Fellow at the IFK International Research Center for Cultural Studies at the University of Art and Design Linz. She graduated in Cultural and Social Anthropology as well as Arabian Studies in Vienna. Kössner’s research interests range from violence, conflict and human rights to memory, migration and transnational dynamics.

Klaudia Rottenschlager, Mag.[a], is a doctoral student at the Department of Cultural and Social Anthropology of the University of Vienna. Currently she works at the Intervention Center for Trafficked Women and at the APPEAR Project *Conflict, Participation and Development in Palestine* in Vienna. Her research interests include feminist and postcolonial theory, violence, nationalism, forced migration and critical geography.

Irina Scheitz, Bakk. phil., M.A., graduated in March 2013 in the studies of Cultural Differences and Transnational Processes (CREOLE), a Joint European Master Degree in Social and Cultural Anthropology at the Universities of Vienna and Maynooth in Ireland. She did her bachelor degree in Publicity and Communication Science. From June 2008 to January 2010 she worked at Women without Borders as a research assistant and has work experience as a journalist. Her research interests range from societies in conflict, peacebuilding, concepts of identity, globalisation and transition processes as well as concepts of space, to education systems and visual anthropology.

Sanda Üllen, Mag.[a], is a PhD candidate at the Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology in Vienna. Üllen’s research interests include memory, politics of belonging and identity, migration and violence with a regional focus on the Western Balkans.