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DEATH & RESURRECTION

CREDITS

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DEATH & RESURRECTION

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DEATH & RESURRECTION

This issue of *The Unfamiliar* includes contributions on a wide range of topics related to the place of death in human social life. Alongside explorations of life-cycle rituals in Georgia; commemorative practices and discourses surrounding a Russian monument for the deceased and a virtual 'death mask' image circulated by Turkish protesters, the issue also includes reflections on political violence in Iran; European Renaissance ossuaries; and a poem that provides a more creative take on the subject. A common thread running through these pieces is the well-studied anthropological theme of death as an - often ritualized - event of 'transition' from one stage to another, rather than a decisive 'end'. It produces persistent material reminders - such as bones, graves, monuments, and belongings of the deceased - that serve as loci for existing social ties to be maintained or new ones to be reconstituted.

Rather than merely a source of morbid fascination, the centrality of death to the social and cultural practices explored in this issue emerges as an important resource for the living – in the concrete acts of mourning and commemoration studied by Chabukiani, Prell, and Yaneva-Toraman, but also in the more diffuse reflective processes outlined by Shafafi, Tradii and Watt. For this reason at least, the different kinds of relationships human beings construe around and beyond death deserve sustained attention not only as objects of social scientific study in their own right, but also in a more compassionate, reflexive way - one which resonates with anthropology's sometimes neglected 'moral' charter, hinting at the universality of experience that underlies human cultural variability.

Perhaps not coincidentally, the issue also marks a different kind of 'transition' for *The Unfamiliar* itself. After two years of serving as executive editors - often stressful, but often also extremely rewarding - we are stepping down from our position. This will allow the journal to benefit from the fresh ideas and dedication of our successors, who - we are certain - will do a splendid job in continuing to manage the project that began so many years ago. They will thus continue to present anthropology in an accessible, but still academically rigorous form, one which can hopefully allow the vast range and intellectual dynamism of anthropological work to reach audiences beyond narrow, and often all too lonely, circles of academia. Here is to hoping that the insights of our contributors regarding the tenacious and creatively managed vitality of social life after 'death' will extend to this new phase in the life cycle of *The Unfamiliar*.

Jona Fras & Grit Wesser

ESSAYS

// ESSAYS I //

MOURNING WITH MASKS:
POLITICAL DEATH & VIRTUAL LIFE

// INNA ZLATIMIROVA YANEVA-TORAMAN

ABSTRACT // In this essay I explore how the V mask (Guy Fawkes mask) not only became a 'resistance' mask for the Turkish protesters during the 2013 Gezi Park demonstrations, but also how it visually transformed into a new image. I argue that this new face became a virtual 'death mask' for one of the killed protesters and that the image exemplifies a shift in commemorative practices. Furthermore, I examine the relationship between this mask and the process of mourning to discover why the Turkish protesters decided to adopt this particular mask for the dead. This essay argues that the mask and the need to wear it can be explained as an attempt to keep the lost one alive by virtually becoming him. In this sense, the V mask transformed from being just a 'political' symbol in real life activist movements, into a new mask which signifies something beyond the political, that is, a more 'personal' connection with the deceased that in turn 'resurrects' him.

Here I am alive and folks carry my image — more than anyone will ever do when I'm dead.

Sosia, line 459 act 1 scene 1

On 8 June 2013, as I was waiting for the ferry in front of the Kadıköy pier in Istanbul, a man carrying a big black bag and a roughly made portable table approached the building. Without losing any of his precious time, he placed this wooden piece of furniture at the entrance and quickly unpacked his merchandise. After carefully placing a few of his products on the table he began shouting: 'Resistance masks! Resistance masks for everyone!'[1] *('Direniş maskesi! Herkese direniş maskesi!')*. There was nothing extraordinary about this man. He was one of the many who would peddle the cheapest products for the highest price when the time was right. He was one of those men who sold umbrellas at the busiest streets in Kadıköy to the unlucky few who were caught in the rain unprepared. He was just one of those 'ordinary' men who 'Istanbulers' passed almost every day. Yet there was something out of ordinary that day. He was not selling just any product, but 'resistance masks', as he called them. Later that day, I noticed that a small shop for sewing materials in the district Maltepe, had added a new product to its shop window. Placed at the centre of the shelf, so that anyone passing could see it, a brand new 'resistance mask' was waiting for its owner.

It was the tenth day of the Gezi Park protests and apart from the heat and the overcrowded streets, which on a normal day were just enough to cause frustration, one could also feel the tension and uneasiness in the public spaces. Turkish flags were hanging from balconies as a sign of support for the protests and quite often one could see that people walking in the streets would look up to check who is who in terms of their political sentiments. TV screens in cafés and shops repeatedly showed images of the events and at some point or another, conversations invariably turned to the topic. What had started as a peaceful demonstration to 'save' a small urban park located next to Taksim Square (in Istanbul's Beyoğlu district) had escalated into a series of riots throughout the country's major cities. There were three events that raised the public awareness on the subject. First, there was the police intervention when they decided to handle the initial sit-in with excessive use of pepper spray. Afterwards, on the fifth morning just before dawn, masked municipality workers entered the area occupied by the demonstrators, pulled everyone out of the park and set the tents on fire. Those who resisted were violently beaten. This was followed by the Turkish Prime Minister's public speech on the construction of the third Bosporus Bridge in which he also included a message for the protestors: 'Do whatever you do, we have already decided.'

News of these events spread so quickly that by the end of the day hundreds of people organized Gezi park protest in at least five of Turkey's major cities. However, each of the demonstrations was handled so violently by the police (with excessive use of tear gas and pressurized water) that on the next morning even more people poured into the streets. Thus the Gezi Park protests developed into a 'resistance' (*direniş*) movement against the Prime Minister's 'authoritarian' style of rule and against police violence (Fraser and Emiroğlu 2013). Thousands filled the streets, occupied urban parks, made noise with pans and pots, and shouted day and night for the Prime Minister's resignation since he did not recognize the opinion of the 'people' (*halk*).

In the following two months clouds of tear gas covered the cities, barricades and pools of blood divided the streets while cafés, offices and hotel lobbies became infirmaries for the injured protesters. Yet amongst the poisonous mists, protesters stood their ground fighting for their rights. Wearing gas masks, swimming goggles, medical masks, scarfs and motorcycle helmets, the protesters did not leave the streets, but reassembled each time they were scattered away through gas, water and plastic bullets. Beside all these objects used as protection against the effects of tear gas, there was also another one that did not protect but 'silently' carried a message.

This was the V mask (fictional Guy Fawkes mask) from the 1982-89 comic book series *V for Vendetta*, created by Alan Moore and David Lloyd, and on that hot sunny day in Istanbul the demand for this mask had become so high that one could even find it at this tiny shop in Maltepe. One of my informants, a 27-year-old Gezi Park protester, who is also a big fan of the series, recalls:

> Once it was impossible to find it and we had to order it on eBay. We paid so much for its delivery and waited almost a month until it arrived, but now everyone can get it almost everywhere in Istanbul.

And indeed, by the end of the first week of the protests, the V mask had become so popular among the protesters that now it was sold as a 'resistance mask' (Dedeoğlu 2013).

In fact the image had become a symbol of political activism long before the Turkish protests. Originally created for a graphic novel, this little piece of art first materialized into real life with the hacker activist (or 'hacktivist') group called 'Anonymous'. Since then, the mask had appeared in movements all around the globe including Occupy Wall Street, the Arab Spring and the US anti-SOPA/PIPA demonstrations; eventually transforming the image into a symbol of anonymity, equality and freedom (Sauter 2012). However, in the case of Turkey not only did the mask represent 'resistance', but it has also become a tool for commemoration, when it was transformed into another face – one that represented a killed Gezi Park protester. With some visual modifications the mask's meaning went

[1] Unless otherwise specified all Turkish was translated by the author.

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beyond the 'political' and created a more 'personal' connection with the dead by virtually sustaining his presence.

In this essay, I will argue that the adoption of this particular mask, unintentionally created a way to mourn the protester. I will also illustrate that the mask did not only represent the deceased but also embodied the survivors' own selves, in the form of the 'imaginary' deceased. My main argument is that through this mask, the protesters kept the dead present in order to reconstruct their 'selves' and their connections with the world, thus reconfiguring death into a positive element for being alive. In order to do so, I will present some ideas regarding the conception of the person and how masks create ambiguities. Finally, I will conclude my argument with a few comments on the virtual 'self' (yet it should be noted that throughout the essay I use the term 'virtual' as 'digital' – as from the virtual world of the internet), and will demonstrate how this particular process of mourning illustrates the interrelatedness of objects, selves, ideas and spaces.

FIGURE 1 A Turkish man wearing the V mask. Istanbul, 2013 *(Photograph: Ertunç Ertav)*

THE DEATH OF ETHEM

On 1 June 2013, news that a protester had been shot with a 'real bullet'[2] at the Gezi Park protests in the capital Ankara went viral on Facebook and Twitter. At first there were many debates regarding the reliability of the information and many refused to believe that the police had begun using live ammunition at the protesters. For days no one knew what had really happened to the young man named Ethem Sarısülük and since the government officials refused to comment on the event, terror spread among the demonstrators. As I was actively following the social media and the online stream of information regarding the events that took place in Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir and Eskişehir (four of the major cities in Turkey), I can recall the fear expressed by many protesters during the following days. On Twitter accounts, some of them wrote 'Be careful they are using real bullets now!' or 'Run when you see the police they have orders to shoot and kill.'[3] The shock from the shooting was thus followed by panic and fear, and when it was finally officially announced that Ethem had died from a gunshot to the head, his death became the manifestation of 'what people were "fighting" for'[4]. His image became the face for the word 'resistance'.

A few weeks later on 24 June a new mask emerged on the internet. Published by the Turkish socialist 'hacktivist' group 'Redhack', it demanded justice for the protester's death. Merged with the V mask, Ethem Sarısülük had been resurrected in a new image. The cold white face with a serious look and beard just like Ethem's lacked the 'resistance' mask's archaic grin. In fact, one may say that the face was stripped of emotion – posed in stillness between life and death. Along with the image there was also a message, urging people to use this mask as their Facebook and/or Twitter profile photos until the police officer responsible for Ethem's death was punished. Just in hours the picture went viral on both social websites as hundreds donned the mask on their virtual 'faces'.

Although the Ethem mask appeared as a kind of protest against the unjust death of the demonstrator, I argue that at the same time the idea to make a mask and the need to wear it was also a way to mourn his loss. To elaborate, I turn to Freud's early theory about mourning, where he suggested that mourning worked as a process of recollecting memories about the deceased (Freud 1917). He argued that during this phase the survivor replaces the actual absence of the person with an imaginary presence. In other words, he seeks a 'magical' recovery of the lost one. According to Freud such desire to 'resurrect' the dead was of course, for self-satisfying reasons. Drawing from his 'primary narcissism' theory, he suggested that we love others because of their ability to embody and reflect a part of our self (Freud 1914). Therefore, during mourning the survivor attempts to reclaim that part of his 'self' which he has originally projected onto the other. In order to do so, he tries to keep the lost object alive by identifying with the dead in an attempt to become him. Nevertheless, this identification also leads to the idealisation of the lost one, since the mourner chooses to remember only his best qualities (Freud 1917).

In fact, wearing a mask can be considered as the most obvious representation of this urge to become the deceased. Thus, it is possible to suggest that despite the original idea behind the creation of the Ethem mask, the image functioned as a way to mourn his death. In this sense,

[2] The news stressed 'real bullet' because until that day only plastic bullets were used for crowd control.

[3] It is also difficult to find the original source of these posts since they were massively re-tweeted.

[4] This phrase was used by six of my informants.

FIGURE 2 The Ethem Mask *(Image: RedHack 2013)*

Turkish protesters replaced the absence of Ethem with an imaginary presence through his new virtual image. The mask, on the other hand, represented the deceased yet it was not really him or more precisely completely him, for it was not a photograph but a symbolic representation – a fusion of two distinct faces. It was thus a representation of only the 'best' in Ethem, that is, his innocence, ideas and his bravery – something that each protester could relate to. This can also explain why when hundreds donned the virtual mask, many also posted the phrase 'One dies – thousand resurrect' (*'Bir ölür bin diriliriz'*) expressing that Ethem lives on within them. Nevertheless, this idealised image that continued to live was the 'imaginary' Ethem that reflected the protesters' own selves, since even the ones who did not know the deceased in person could relate to him, feel his loss and eventually replace it with a presence exceeding the real world.

However, here it is crucial to state that Ethem became 'known' to most of the protestors only after his death. Indeed, this complicates the Freudian framework on mourning, where the deceased is lost to the ones who mourn him. In Freud's analysis the deceased is a 'lost object' taken away from the survivor. His death constitutes personal loss – loss of an individual already present in the survivor's life. However, in Ethem's case the deceased was 'added' to the protester's lives after his death, thus his death cannot be considered only as the loss of the individual. This raises a question: who or what was really lost then?

Various ethnographic examples have illustrated that many different cultures perceive the death of the individual as disrupting society itself by challenging the social order. Consequently, mortuary rites have been discussed in terms of restoring the sociality of the survivors, re-establishing the communal ties, and maintaining the social order (see Hertz 1960, Huntington and Metcalf 1979, Bloch and Parry 1982). Of course, death beliefs, mortuary rites and mourning practices vary to a great extent throughout different societies, however, what seems to be a common feature (at least in a more general sense) is the idea that death endangers the society and that through the mortuary rites society regenerates itself. Though Ethem's death itself did not present a danger for the Turkish people, it did symbolise the presence of a threat – the loss of safety and recognition by the state. In a sense, his death distorts the categorical boundaries that separate death from the political, and the individual from society, rendering the deceased both as an individual and as something else at the same time. In this context it is the shared sentiment – the ideas that are embraced by the deceased – that embody the protesters' own selves in the form of the 'imaginary' Ethem. Therefore, the fusion of the two faces in the Ethem mask unintentionally created a way to mourn Ethem's death, and transformed the negativity of his death into something positive, that is, by keeping death present in life, the survivors were able to detach themselves from the deceased and project their selves once again onto others, thus reconstituting themselves and their ties with one another.

To suggest that the Ethem mask was an attempt to mourn the lost protester and that this 'resurrected' him in the process brings forth two questions. First, was the success of the Ethem mask a result of this 'unique' merger with the V mask? And second, to what extent was Ethem still present in the Ethem mask? In order to answer these, we should probably turn to the meta narrative of *V for Vendetta* where it is emphasized that the man behind the V mask is no longer a man of flesh and blood but an idea.

THE MASK OF AN IDEA

In one of their comments a member of the group 'Anonymous', an Anon' nicknamed 'That_Anonymous_Coward' explained why the V mask became a symbol for Anonymous and for resistance in general.

> We are told to remember the idea, not the man, because a man can fail. He can be caught, he can be killed and forgotten, but 400 years later, an idea can still change the world… Because the ideas carried forward by those in the masks are more important than the individual messengers…Because the mask can let you see that you are not alone, that there are others who feel as you feel and are unwilling to take it anymore without a fight. That even as you take away some masked troublemaker, there are more behind them making sure the message is still heard. (That_Anonymous_Coward 2012)

Similarly one of my informants, a 17-year-old Turkish

'Anon', explains that the V mask represents the 'unity' of a single idea: the struggle for equality, justice, and freedom. He also adds that 'it doesn't matter who is wearing it or whether he or she is part of Anonymous or not, because it is the idea that matters'. In this sense, the person behind the mask becomes part of a *unity* of an idea. Similarly, Sauter (2012) suggests that the power and attraction of Anonymous is built around the concept of a hoard. To elaborate she refers to the group's unofficial motto: 'We are legion. We do not forgive. We do not forget. Expect us.' explaining that the phrase 'we are legion' shows the peculiar nature of Anonymous where different individuals join the group by 'temporarily subsuming their personalities under the larger, meta-personality of the Anonymous hoard' (Sauter 2012). However, here I argue that what is subsumed with the mask, if subsumed at all, is not the 'personality' of the individual but the 'self' as a whole. Although Sauter does not describe in depth what she means by 'personality', the term itself can be easily confused with a more passive transformation, where the person behind the mask becomes only a representative of an idea rather than the very idea.

To elaborate it is necessary to note that for quite some time now Western societies have entertained the

> conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more-or-less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgement, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes, and against social and natural background… (Geertz 1983: 59)

This has led us to depict the person as an autonomous entity struggling to create his own personal and social identity. Furthermore, as Napier (1992) suggests, we have been obsessed with the 'integrity of personality' – the sense of what we are – that we cannot accept any 'change so radical as to turn us into something "different"' for it would mean to become selfless (ibid: 147-148). On the other hand, we have configured the body as the container of ourselves, setting the boundaries of what constitutes the unique self, and we have become these fixed perceivers of the world. In this context consciousness becomes the locus of establishing personality, and in turn, because personality is our conscious level of being – the phenomenon bounded by the categorical differences we perceive – we are so afraid to lose it for that would result in selflessness.

However, what masks seem to do is to distort these categorical differences and address the ambiguities of point of view. And while many have discussed wearing masks in terms of losing personality and becoming what the mask represents (see Cole et al. 1970; Leenhardt 1970; Honigmann 1977), such an explanation would suggest that wearing masks affects only the awareness of the masked person. For example, Honigmann (1977) argues that the Hopi man masked as the *Kachina* spirit and the Austrian *Krampus* at St Nicholas Day both are violent because their feelings and attitudes become appropriated by the characters represented with the masks. Therefore, he concludes, in both cases the men's awareness of who they are is affected by the mask (Honigmann 1977: 271). Yet, what seems to happen with the donning of the V mask is not a loss of awareness (as subsumed 'personality' by the mask) but a 'becoming' on a much deeper level. That is, since the V mask is the embodiment of an idea, it follows that the wearer would also become that idea. However, here the categorical difference is not simply between two 'personalities' (ex. man/spirit). If it were so we would talk about the V mask in terms of becoming the fictional Guy Fawkes (the representative of the idea) and not the idea.
But what is an *idea* if not just a reflection of one's own 'self' projected onto the other? Why would one desire to become the other? Wouldn't he be willing to do this only if he sees that 'other' as his own 'self'? Here, however, the 'other' does not necessarily need to be another 'self' for one could as well project himself onto objects, like masks as in this case. In this context, I suggest that our ability to project and in turn to receive projections binds all beings in a web of interrelatedness. Thus, I use the term 'self' as the dispersed person (not bound by consciousness and self-awareness), rather than the conscious 'personality' as the fixed perceiver of differences. Then, if we turn back to Freud and his 'primary narcissism,' we may argue that one's will to identify with the 'other,' because of what he sees as an idea embraced by that 'other,' surely fits the hypothesis that we love others less for their uniqueness and more for what they embody from our own selves. If ideas are part of our own 'selves' wouldn't we also consider the 'other' who shares them as part of us too? Then what is the V mask if not the manifestation of the ego which one imagines outside itself, reflecting back the 'self' to oneself. As a result, to wear the V mask means to lose the *unique* 'self,' but not the 'self' as a whole. Here the 'self' is disintegrated and then reintegrated into something else. Hence, we can no longer talk about the 'self' as a static being bound to a single form, but as a multiplicity of potentials where it can even 'become' ideas floating beyond space and time. Consequently, we may suggest that the manifestation of the V mask in real life political and activist movements was a result of its ability to distribute the *unique* 'self' throughout different bodies, in order to create a *unity* of bodies connected by an idea – a network of projecting 'selves'.

THE ETHEM IN THE MASK

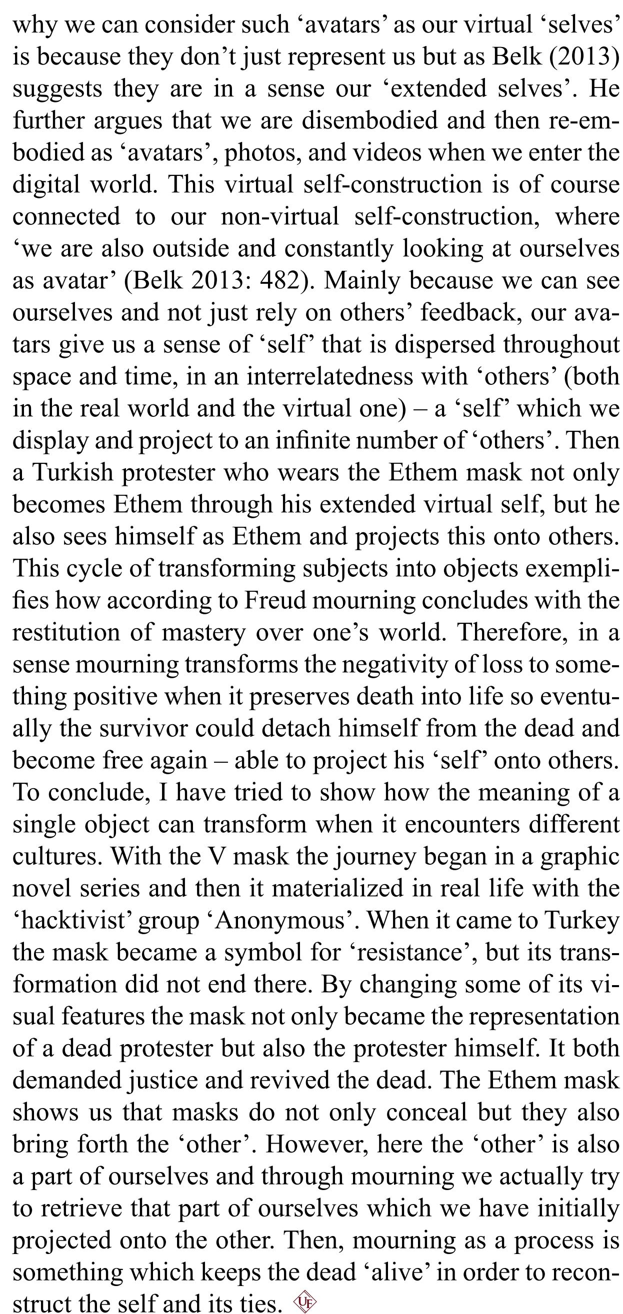
Following this argument, I shall turn back to the question to what extent Ethem is present in the Ethem mask. At first one might have assumed that the mask was 'successful' because of its merged image with the V mask. However, the frequency of its appearance on different virtual profiles was not because it looked like the V mask but because it represented Ethem. In a sense, it represented 'resistance' but in its own culture specific way, where death had become a part of expression for the Turkish protest-

ers. Additionally, the discussion above proves that the V face had not subsumed entirely the part that was Ethem, since the V mask itself could be considered as a manifestation of the ego. Then, it is not the V face that subsumes Ethem but the ego of the one who dons the mask, because primarily the V mask represents an idea – a unity rather that the man in whose image it was created. Therefore, here the question should not be whether the V mask took over the image, but to what extent Ethem continues to exist with the Ethem mask?

Clearly the Turkish protesters believed that Ethem was still present or otherwise they wouldn't have suggested that '[when] one dies thousand resurrect'. But what is intriguing here, is that even the Turkish people argued that metaphorically the deceased still lived within them. In an article series, published by online newspaper Alınteri, over hundred people wrote their last messages to Ethem, a person who some did not even know in life. Each message was directly written to the deceased and it sounded more as if the dead is still present rather than lost. One interesting message published by an anonymous writer in part IV said: "I didn't see how you fell, but I can see how you rise Ethem!" (*Nasıl düştüğünü görmedim, ama nasıl kalktığını görüyorum Ethem!*). And indeed, Ethem was rising. He was now present more than ever in this new form that he had taken as the 'idealised' Ethem – the outcome of what Freud describes as the phase of recollecting memories about the deceased. This Ethem was the one rising through the V face which made it possible for everyone to identify with him. The mask could no longer be the real face of Ethem, but an abstract one which embodied 'resistance' since the collective memories about Ethem could only constitute a brave 'face' that 'fought' and died at the Gezi Park protests. Additionally, the creation of a symbolic Ethem – a face which cannot be killed (because that's the idea behind the V mask) – in the form of a mask, exemplifies how during the process of mourning the survivors attempted to keep the deceased alive. On the other hand, the 'real' Ethem, although subsumed by the ego, still *haunted* the survivors for the mask did not become a mask of different selves but a collective Ethem, constantly reminding them of him. By recollecting their parts originally projected on him, they also took a part of his image onto themselves. They kept the 'real' dead present by becoming him through the donning of this virtual mask until the process of mourning him and them could be concluded.

CONCLUSION

With no previous knowledge of the V mask, it is quite hard to perceive the Ethem mask as a mask. In fact, we can only perceive objects in their context; therefore, a mask can be a mask only if it is used as a mask, that is, to cover a face. Here I have argued that the Ethem mask was a mask because Turkish protesters used it as their virtual profile picture. In other terms, they changed their virtual visual 'self' or 'avatar' with the Ethem face. The reason



why we can consider such 'avatars' as our virtual 'selves' is because they don't just represent us but as Belk (2013) suggests they are in a sense our 'extended selves'. He further argues that we are disembodied and then re-embodied as 'avatars', photos, and videos when we enter the digital world. This virtual self-construction is of course connected to our non-virtual self-construction, where 'we are also outside and constantly looking at ourselves as avatar' (Belk 2013: 482). Mainly because we can see ourselves and not just rely on others' feedback, our avatars give us a sense of 'self' that is dispersed throughout space and time, in an interrelatedness with 'others' (both in the real world and the virtual one) – a 'self' which we display and project to an infinite number of 'others'. Then a Turkish protester who wears the Ethem mask not only becomes Ethem through his extended virtual self, but he also sees himself as Ethem and projects this onto others. This cycle of transforming subjects into objects exemplifies how according to Freud mourning concludes with the restitution of mastery over one's world. Therefore, in a sense mourning transforms the negativity of loss to something positive when it preserves death into life so eventually the survivor could detach himself from the dead and become free again – able to project his 'self' onto others. To conclude, I have tried to show how the meaning of a single object can transform when it encounters different cultures. With the V mask the journey began in a graphic novel series and then it materialized in real life with the 'hacktivist' group 'Anonymous'. When it came to Turkey the mask became a symbol for 'resistance', but its transformation did not end there. By changing some of its visual features the mask not only became the representation of a dead protester but also the protester himself. It both demanded justice and revived the dead. The Ethem mask shows us that masks do not only conceal but they also bring forth the 'other'. However, here the 'other' is also a part of ourselves and through mourning we actually try to retrieve that part of ourselves which we have initially projected onto the other. Then, mourning as a process is something which keeps the dead 'alive' in order to reconstruct the self and its ties.

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THE KOLYMA ROAD & THE MASK OF SORROW:
REMEMBERING THE GULAG IN POST-SOVIET MAGADAN

// NORMAN PRELL

ABSTRACT // This essay explores the relationship between place and memory in the former Gulag periphery of Magadan in northeastern Russia. Located on the coast of the Okhotsk Sea, the city of Magadan emerged as a gateway to the sparsely populated region after the discovery of gold in the late 1920s. Today, a huge monument, the Mask of Sorrow, raised upon a hill on the margin of the city, commemorates the hundreds of thousands of prisoners who were shipped to Magadan during the dictatorship of Stalin to work in the region's newly established gold mines. Crucial to the region's development was the construction of the legendary Kolyma Road between the port of Magadan and the industrial areas at the upper Kolyma River. Built by prisoners under the most adverse conditions, this road is often referred to as 'Road of Bones'. This essay demonstrates how the Mask of Sorrow and the Kolyma Road, during particular commemorative events, participate in the enactment of a historical landscape that bears the potential for a ritual return of the victims of the Gulag.

The columns of prisoners marched around the clock day after day right through the town from the port to the disinfection center… In the predawn mist of the early morning, when Tolya walked to school, one after another those columns would come flowing toward him. Their characteristic sound was the shuffling of hundreds of shoe soles, the muffled, indistinguishable talk, the shouts of the guards, the growling of the dogs. (Vasilii Aksenov, cited in Hochschild 1994: 247)

When 16-year-old Vassilii Aksenov (Tolya) joined his mother in Magadan in 1948, he soon got used to the sight of prisoners being convoyed every day through this isolated city in the Far Northeast of Russia. His mother, the famous Gulag author Evgenia Ginzburg, had been released from the local camps but was required to stay in Magadan for another five years. The last time she had seen her son was when she had left the four-year-old back in her Kazan flat on her arrest ten years earlier. For Aksenov, who became a famous author himself, the streets of Magadan had remained with him by means of an image of hundreds of shoes shuffling past him day after day. When he included this scene in his autobiographical novel *The Burn* (*Ozhog*), first published in Italy in 1980, he tried to refer back to a place that had once seized him as a world apart from anything he could have imagined before.[1] Trying to remember and to describe the unspeakable, Aksenov returns to the evocative image of hundreds of prisoners anonymously passing him on the street, without either of us knowing in detail who those prisoners were and where they went. I have chosen this scene, because it introduces well the main question of this text: How does a city like Magadan, which has come to represent suffering and death in the Gulag more than any other place, communicate in time? I want to follow this question with regard to people's experiences of the past during particular commemorative events and in relation to the preservation of memory in monuments and in the region's landscape. Here I am particularly interested in the role of monuments and landscape for postcatastrophic memory, such as in relation to the Gulag but also in consideration of the more recent collapse of the Soviet Union.

THE ROAD UP TO THE KOLYMA RIVER AS A CHALLENGE TO POST-SOVIET MEMORY

During the years of the Gulag Magadan functioned as the doorway to one of the most isolated and most dreaded punishment regions of the Soviet Union, according to Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, 'the greatest and most famous island in the Gulag Archipelago' (2003: xv). The Gulag functioned as a bureaucratic acronym for a special police department, created in 1929, that oversaw the administration of all corrective labour camps and labour settlements in the former Soviet Union (*Glavnoe Upravlenie Lagerei*). At the same time, the term 'Gulag' has also become synonymous with the entire system of excessive punishment and mass terror under the rule of Joseph Stalin. From 1929 until 1953, when Stalin died, estimates indicate that 24 million people were either sentenced to prison labour or exiled to remote areas of the USSR (Applebaum 2003: 4-5). Besides the political repression of the so-called 'enemies of the people' (*vrag naroda*), forced labour and colonisation also functioned as a crucial means to the country's industrialisation and collectivisation process in those years. Only prisoners and exiles could be forced to work and settle, for example, in Russia's isolated and inhospitable Far Northeast.

The Russian Northeast, map section from U.S.S.R. - Terrain and Transportation, 1974. *(Image courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries at Austin)*

Located on the coast of the Okhotsk Sea, Magadan started to function as a gateway to the region after the discovery of gold at the upper Kolyma River during the late 1920s. In 1932, the sparsely populated region was taken under the control of a special local construction trust (*Dal'stroi*), charged by the Soviet government with the region's rapid development by means of a local forced labour system (*Sevvostlag*). According to regional archival documents it is estimated that around 870,000 prisoners were shipped to Magadan in order to build roads and work in the region's gold mines.[2] Although the department of the Gulag was dissolved in 1960 and most of the camps had been dismantled after Stalin's death, the legacy of the Gulag as a social and cultural phenomenon continues up to the present day. During Soviet times any official memory of the Stalin Terror was suppressed. Only with the beginning of Gorbachev's project of reform, known as *glasnost* (transparency/openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring), in the 1980s, there was an outpouring of personal accounts and memoirs from underneath the surface of silence which suddenly started to be communicated in public. But even then, remembering and representing a catastrophic past has often been a painful and impossible process. One major concern in the memory of the Gulag,

[1] See also: John Pohlmann: Conversations with Vassily Aksyonov. http://www.sovlit.net/conversationswithaksyonov/ [03/10/2013].

[2] For numbers of prisoners and victims of the Kolyma Gulag, see for example: Panikarov (2007: 267-283) who bases his account on the work of two local historians: Batsaev and Kozlov (2002).

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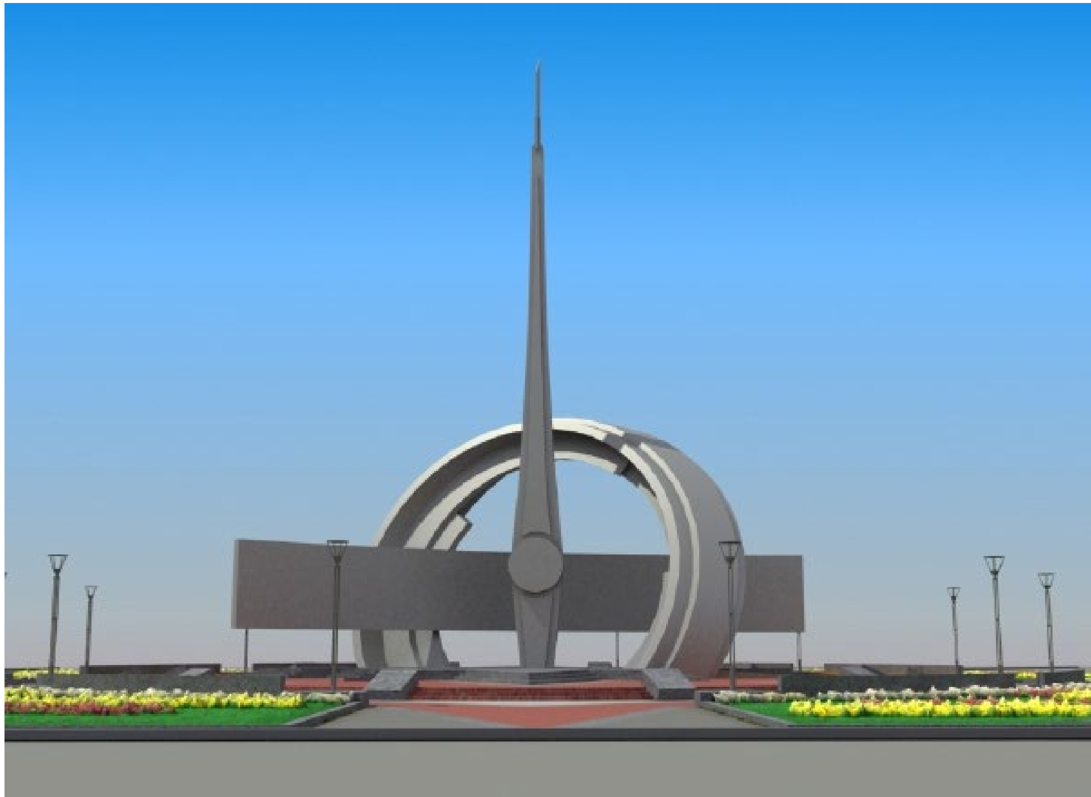

Model of future monument by Kramarenko

Berzin's bust in front of city admin

including the juridical question of responsibility, remains the challenge of coming to terms with the incommensurable dimension of suffering and death that had been hidden away during Soviet times. For example, how can individuals and the Russian public today commemorate the large number of victims of the Gulag, most of whom disappeared anonymously and without a proper burial?

When Aksenov joined his mother in exile, Magadan mainly consisted of watch towers, barbed wire fences and prison barracks. Only the two main streets, *Prospekt Lenina* and *Prospekt Stalina*, had barely been built up, reminding him of a real city. In contrast, the road up to the Kolyma River (500 kilometres) had already been in operation for more than a decade. This contradiction of a poorly developed capital city, compared with the road, which had been forced onto the region's difficult landscape within only a few years, clearly underlines the priority of the Dal'stroi construction enterprise. It shows that Magadan above all functioned as a transit base for prisoners who after their arrival on ship were sent further on to the mining areas at the Kolyma River, with the Kolyma Road serving as a key infrastructure in the region's industrial management. It was this transient aura of a tragic-heroic construction site, exclusively focused on the region's mineral exploitation through the excessive employment of forced human labour, which Aksenov became aware of when he first saw the columns of prisoners flowing towards him. The shuffling of hundreds of shoes passing him on the street every day symbolises the constant arrival of new shiploads of prisoners in Magadan. It metaphorically produces the image of a place that constantly vanishes away into the region, but also refuses hold in terms of memory when it comes to remember all those who never came back from the mines. The historical experience of the Gulag is thus reflected in the region's material landscape and speaks in the very architecture of the road itself, where the city's main street, *Prospekt Lenina*, flows into the region's highway, without any major interruption, but in a single, straight line disappearing towards the Kolyma River.

There have been recent discussions in the local media concerning the idea of creating a new image for Magadan's future. One important aspect of the debate relates to the construction of a new monument highlighting the beginning of the Kolyma Road in Magadan. Such monument perhaps would interrupt the constant flight of the city's main street into the region, helping its residents to identify their city as a place on its own. In one of our many conversations, a local geologist, who has been living and working in Magadan for a long time, introduced me to his own thoughts regarding the possible shape and message of such monument. One Saturday morning in May 2012, we left the city in order to spend the day out exploring the surrounding landscape. Passing a roundabout that could be seen as a kind of demarcation between city and region, Boris M. Sedov suggested that in the centre of this roundabout the road could simulate a tunnel, going underneath the road's surface with columns of human figures disappearing into the ground. This kind of memorial montage, according to him, would be able to communicate both the region's tragic Gulag but also its gold mining past. However, following the discussions in the local news and talking to one of the leading artists who has actually been involved in the planning of the new monument, the dominating idea has come to concentrate on the commemoration of the region's geological opening and industrial construction without referring to its forced labour system. According to the artist, Evgenii P. Kramarenko, the region's tragic past has already been addressed by another monument, the Mask of Sorrow, as well located at the margin of the city and speaking exclusively to the former Gulag. The new monument, replicating a magnetic compass to represent the geological expeditions at the beginning of the region's Soviet development, shall address the other, more heroic, side of the region's history. Significantly, the colossal monument of the Mask of Sorrow has often been identified by local residents during our conversations as being ugly and ill-proportioned. This aesthetic dislike of the city's most famous Gulag memorial, however, was often accompanied by a more substantial critique or resistance against the existing view, mainly from outside the region, of associating Magadan first of all and often exclusively with the terror of the Gulag.

ENTERING THE FIELD AND WORKING WITH THE REGION'S LANDSCAPE

When I started my field research in September 2011, my mind was filled with images from the memoirs and personal accounts of former Kolyma prisoners. One of the things that I wanted to do first was to explore the city of Magadan as the original background of those events that happened more than half a century ago. However, at least in the beginning, my mental representations hardly coincided with the material reality of the present city. While walking along its streets, Magadan did not automatically reveal to me its Gulag past. The place, of course, has changed since the local forced labour system had been dissolved during the 1950s. The prison barracks have been replaced by common tenement houses. The watch towers and barbed wire fences have disappeared in the process of reconstructing and redefining Magadan after Stalin's death.

Despite the region's on-going economic and social decline after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Magadan continues to exist as an important gateway to the region and as administrative as well as economic centre in the Russian Northeast. According to its residents, the worst effects of postsocialist transformation, such as food supply shortages and unemployment, have now been overcome. After the region's population had dropped by 50 percent during the 1990s, the city of Magadan has regained a certain degree of economic stability within the last ten years. Most of the people I interviewed have lived in Magadan for a long time, but not long enough to have personally

experienced the Gulag. Often they came to the region as contract workers, following the Soviet propaganda of the North and attracted by higher salaries and other financial and social benefits. During our conversations I became aware that most of my interlocutors had strong local identities that had been created through their personal participation in the region's industrial and ideological construction and as part of the process of overcoming the region's inhospitable conditions. I started to understand, why my interlocutors sometimes felt rather frustrated when my questions kept asking about the region's Gulag while ignoring their own historical experiences and sense of place. Even though they often viewed my questions unfavourably, they generously kept inviting me to their homes and often took me on trips into the region in order to share their lives and their beautiful natural surroundings with me. During these experiences, I learned to read the actual city how it is today, while the Gulag of the past often entirely disappeared from my mind.

And yet, the longer I stayed in Magadan and the more I got to know its people, I also increasingly felt the hidden but unavoidable presence of the region's tragic past. Walking daily its streets and reading about the city's history in the local library and in the regional archive gradually resulted in me having a more intimate relationship with Magadan. Slowly, I began to see its places beyond their immediate appearance also following their traces back into the past. This spatial-temporal conversation was increasingly influenced through the accounts of some of the few remaining ex-prisoners, to whom I was kindly introduced at official meetings organised by the local Caritas and the Magadan Committee of the Victims of Political Repressions. Listening to their narratives and trying to catch a glimpse of their lives would sometimes bring back into existence for me this 'other place' related to the region's Gulag. According to Eric Hirsch in *The Anthropology of Landscape,*

> [t]here is the landscape we initially see and a second landscape which is produced through local practice and which we come to recognize and understand through fieldwork and through ethnographic description and interpretation (1996: 2).

I believe that this process of recognition and the conjunction of different spatial-temporal settings in one and the same place is what I have experienced during my own fieldwork in Magadan. However, interestingly, Hirsch relates the subjective experience of the researcher during fieldwork to a more general pattern in which landscape appears and interacts as a cultural and physical surrounding in any local context. Trying to go beyond the Western convention of landscape as an ideal representation of the material world, Hirsch suggests an understanding of landscape that builds on the relationship between those ideal representations and the actual world of everyday social life:

> There is a relationship here between an ordinary, workaday life and an ideal imagined existence, vaguely connected to, but still separate from, that of the everyday… Defined in this way, then, 'landscape' entails a relationship between the 'foreground' and 'background' of social life (Hirsch 1996: 3).

Again I believe that this conceptual distinction between foreground and background landscape corresponds well with the different spatial-temporal readings of place in and around the city of Magadan. This distinction helps me to enter a discussion of memory and place in Magadan, bearing in mind my own limitations in understanding the region's historical background, but also in relation to the different social and political enactments of the past in the region itself.

THE MASK OF SORROW AND THE ENACTMENT OF A HISTORICAL LANDSCAPE

Since its inauguration in 1996, the Mask of Sorrow is the most famous Gulag memorial site in the entire region. Situated at the margin of the city by the Kolyma Road, the monument commemorates the location of a former transit camp where prisoners used to be taken after their arrival in Magadan and before their departure to the region's industrial area. Raised upon a hill and resembling a human face, the huge concrete sculpture looms above the city and watches all over the surrounding landscape. Viewed from close up, tears in the form of smaller masks can be seen dropping from its left eye. The other half of the face is arranged around a barren window that is underlined by an anonymous prison number: И-О-937. According to the author of the monument, Ernst Neizvestnyi, the mask's face divides into two sections, one of which refers to Gulag punishment and incarceration in the past, while the other also relates to the act of mourning and the obligation of memory in the present (Raizman 2003).

Neizvestnyi, a Russian émigré living in the US, was invited to Magadan in order to discuss the monument on the initiative of the local representative of the Russian Human Rights Organisation Memorial in 1989. In the following years, while a great part of the region's population was struggling with the effects of post-Soviet transformation, the new monument was vividly discussed in the local newspapers. According to the local historian David Raizman (2003), not everyone supported the idea of an expensive art-memory project in the time of economic crisis. In the end, the monument was co-sponsored by the federal government in Moscow and the regional government in Magadan, but also supported by other private funding initiatives in Russia and the US. However, the long public debate preceding the creation of the monument was not only a financial issue. It also conveyed the emergence of a new political discourse that was strongly affected by questions related to the past and finally started to take on itself the task of coming to terms with the so-

cial catastrophe of the Gulag. According to the architect of the monument, Kamil Kozaev, the Mask of Sorrow is a clear statement to the world that Russia is willing to repent for the atrocities of the Gulag (Raizman 2003). However, comparing the on-going debate of state-sponsored memory in Germany after the Holocaust, James Young (1992: 270) argues that there exists a 'paralyzing ambiguity' in state-sponsored memory when it comes to the commemoration of the victims of crimes which the state itself has perpetrated. In Russia this ambiguity is further complicated, because terror and violence were organised by the state arbitrarily against its own people. The social catastrophe of the Gulag, therefore, involves a problem that Alexander Etkind has termed as 'unjustified repressions', referring to 'senseless acts of violence which do not specify agency and therefore, elude responsibility' (Etkind 2009: 184). Both Young and Etkind demonstrate that in contrast to remembering historical victory or triumph, the memory of self-inflicted genocide and mass-murder poses a completely different challenge to the task-outline of a related monument.

The first new memorial in Magadan during *perestroika* therefore was not dedicated to the victims of the local Gulag but instead came to honour the first boss of the Dal'stroi company, Eduard P. Berzin, who had also been in charge of the local forced labour system. He was arrested in 1937 under the accusation of espionage and sentenced to death in 1938. His bronze bust, mounted in 1989 in front of the local city administration building, has opened a path of memory that will not be easy to tread. It instead allows different narratives to come in that perpetuate the ambiguity of the past in the present. By emphasising Berzin's relatively moderate conduct as the region's chief executor (in comparison to his successors) and highlighting his posthumous rehabilitation in 1956, commemorating him thus still takes a critical distance to the Stalin Terror. It also allows local residents to hold on to their settler identities in line with the region's celebrated construction during socialism. However, the final realisation of the Mask of Sorrow demonstrates how uneasy this narrative of the region's conquest remains with the hundreds and thousands of victims of the local Gulag. Today the Mask of Sorrow plays an important role in the local culture of memory, because it consequently keeps addressing unpopular questions about the atrocities perpetrated in the region's Gulag. In the following paragraphs I want to show how this often difficult communication with the region's past is facilitated by the ritual enactment of a historical landscape that otherwise tends to remain hidden behind the city's actual everyday appearance. The very ritual enactment of this landscape however shows that there exists a constant relationship not only between the foreground and background of social life, but also between the actuality of the present and the memory of the past.

Here I want to follow Neizvestnyi's dual interpretation of the monument as representing the suffering of the prisoners in the past and as addressing also the painful process of mourning in the present. In the formal arrangement of the monument this duality is turned into a separation, when the outline of the sculpture follows a large cross dividing one half of the face from the other. Considering the problem of memory in the particular context of the Gulag, this material division of the mask, at least in my own reading of the monument, metaphorically relates to a disturbing silence between the living and the dead. During my own visits to the monument, this silence was often increased by the effect of a surrounding landscape that found itself in a particular communication with the elevated sculpture. In one direction, gazing out into the distance of the Okhotsk Sea, the Mask of Sorrow holds a kind of mystic contact with the Nagaev Bay, where the prisoners used to arrive on ship during the Dal'stroi period. On the reverse side of the monument a young woman on her knees, with her face covered by her hands, is turned towards the region's interior with the fateful Kolyma Road disappearing towards the Kolyma River. The kneeling woman is joined above her head by a defaced prisoner on a metal cross that seems to fall into the same direction. According to Kozaev, the whole scene on the reverse side of the monument resembles an open church that flows into the surrounding landscape and evokes the idea of an unbounded cemetery for the dead (Raizman 2003).

Together, the Kolyma Road and the Mask of Sorrow constitute a remarkable landscape of memory relating to the region's former Gulag. However this temporally charged landscape does not reveal itself in a simple representational view. Rather it should be understood, with regard to Hirsch's idea of several landscapes interacting with each other simultaneously, as a potential background that is only revealed under particular circumstances. The enactment of the past begins at the Mask of Sorrow that functions as a mediator between different landscapes. The region's background however only begins to speak when other conditions join together as well. In the following paragraphs, I would like to illustrate through an example how this spatial-temporal communication takes place on the occasion of a particular commemorative event. Before I start my ethnographic description, a few more words should be said about the conceptual relationship between memory and place.

The notion of place proposed here does not derive from rational geometry, as outlined, for example, by René Descartes in his *La Géométrie* (2001 [1637]), indicating a spatial site within a three-dimensional-coordinate system. Rather place in this context follows a phenomenological understanding, as advanced, for instance, by Edward Casey (1987) in relation to the Aristotelian notion of containing place as a medium that holds its contents steadily within its own boundaries and thus allows for a certain continuance in time. Considering the relationship between place and memory, Casey asserts that 'it is the stabilizing persistence of place as a container of experiences that contributes so powerfully to its intrinsic memorability' (Casey 1987: 186). However, the notion of place in its

Mask of Sorrow

Magadan and Nagaev Bay, Sep. 2011

Nagaev Bay in Magadan

Marking the Road of Memory through Magadan on 30 October 2011 *(Photo by V. Smirnova)*

containing function does not imply that the landscape of Magadan and memories of the past do not change. Bearing in mind the idea of different perspectives based on diverse experiences simultaneously at work in one and the same physical location, place and landscape can contain more than one experience of memory and thus must vary accordingly. Consequently, place and landscape are understood as a continuous relationship, as proposed earlier with regard to Hirsch (1996), between different poles of experience that interact but also hold certain tensions with each other. While the containing function of place provides for a certain continuity of experience over time (Casey), the tension within landscape in respect to its different foreground and background qualities (Hirsch) also accounts for the disharmonies involved in the human spatial-temporal encounter. While Casey allows me to understand Magadan as a place that continues in time through the accumulation of historical experience, Hirsch helps me to address the region's historical disjunctions followed by particular problems of memory.

GULAG REMEMBRANCE DAY: THE RETURN OF THE DEAD

In the morning of 30 October 2011, the Russian Remembrance Day of the Victims of Political Repressions, a small group of former prisoners, their families and friends, some representatives of the city administration and others, including myself, meet in front of the local House of Culture in order to join the yearly procession by bus from Nagaev Bay to the Mask of Sorrow. The idea is to commemorate the prisoners' arrival in Magadan and to join them on their walk all the way through the city until the former transit camp at Kilometre Four of the Kolyma Road. Starting off at Nagaev Bay, the two buses slowly followed along the streets of *Kommuny* and *Sovetskaia*, stopping over at the former disinfection centre, and continuing on via *Prospekt Lenina* and the Kolyma Road. For those on the bus, who were not familiar with the region's Gulag past, a local historian illustrated the journey with details about how prisoners used to be convoyed along these streets, with numbers pinned to their backs and in the company of barking dogs. At Kilometre Four on the Kolyma Road the bus turned left onto a small serpentine road approaching the monument from below. By then the atmosphere on the bus had grown increasingly intense. People were singing a popular song composed by Gulag prisoners, *Ia pomniu tot Vaninskii port (I remember that port in Vanino)*, in which the final trip to Magadan is described as a journey to a different planet baring any hope of a return. When we finally arrived at the foot of the Mask of Sorrow, most people on the bus had started to be under the impact of a particular transformation that would draw everybody closer into the emerging space of a commemorative landscape.

Studying the impact of monuments on the flow of time, Mikhail Yampolsky (1995: 96) argues that 'any monument creates around itself… a sort of mystical protective zone… that is apparently connected with the experience of temporal metamorphosis'. This temporal effect is based on the monument's exceptional arrangement in relation to the surrounding landscape, its elevated position and colossal proportions, which, according to Yampolsky, keep the visitor at a functional distance and start to act upon the flow of time when approaching the monument. Relating Yampolsky's argument to the ritual bus tour from Nagaev Bay to the Mask of Sorrow, people's intense reactions on the bus while approaching the monument can partly be explained by this transformation of time. In other words, approaching the Mask of Sorrow by bus has gradually prepared for a breakdown of linear time, that is, of the distinction between past and present. From people's emotional reactions, interpreted in the wider context of my fieldwork experience, I understood that some of us on the bus had started to experience the past in more immediate ways. Long since forgotten events had reappeared on their troubled minds. Distant memories had returned through their reacting bodies. People's lives had joined together although being separated chronologically. The gradual collapse of time in the process of approaching the monument can be seen as a crucial element accompanying the ceremony at the Mask of Sorrow. The arrival at the monument represents one important stage in this process of spatial and temporal approximation. People had started to gather right next to the Mask of Sorrow, while the gigantic sculpture was looming above their heads. Out of this spatial contrast, the monument had grown into the incommensurable and started to play on its transcendental qualities.

On the next stage, the revival of the past and the commemoration of the dead continued with the ritual reading of names from a local book, called *Za nami pridut korabli… (The ships will come for us…)*, published in 1999. Also referred to as Martirolog, this book includes a list of 7,546 registered cases of people who had been sentenced to death by non-juridical local Troika commissions.[3] Following the example of a tradition that had started at the Solovetskii Memorial Stone in Moscow in the early 1990s, volunteers read aloud an alphabetical selection of names from this book. The performance was led by the coordinator of the initiative *Zabveniiu ne podlezhat (We must not forget!)*, Vera I. Smirnova, who afterwards in a conversation with me emphasised the importance of establishing this interpersonal link between the performing volunteer and the dead person on the list whose name is read out in public. This focused communication between the living and the dead seemed to create a kind of bond between most of us who were present at this reading performance. At least during the reciting of those names from this Book of Memory most attendees of the ritual, despite their different personal backgrounds, appeared to be part of one commemorative community.

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[2] Special Troika Commissions (consisting of three people) functioned as an extra-juridical executive organ of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD). They were employed as an instrument for quick execution and punishment during the Stalin Regime.

Once the ritual reading of the names of the dead was concluded, the Mask of Sorrow hill was dominated by an awe-inspiring silence that was only interrupted by the loud chimes of a bell from the barren window in the monument, introducing the ultimate stage of the ceremony. Following the call of the bell, people moved even closer towards the mask, while the first began to slowly climb up a final staircase right into the sculpture's face. Through a small door people then disappeared into the monument, passing through a reconstructed prison cell inside, before reappearing again on the other side of the monument. After the chimes of the bell had stopped, the ritual procession was joined by an unearthly voice forcefully reciting poems that had been composed by prisoners in the camps.[4] Although coming from loudspeakers nearby, this voice, by some technical effect, appeared from a far distance, turning the monument into a liminal pathway to the other-world.

After having followed the prisoners' route through the streets of Magadan, and after having called the victims from a position high above the city, it seemed only logical that people now were going to 'meet' the dead in the sacral womb of the sculpture. Indeed, the reconstructed prison cell inside the monument was dark and narrow. People had to pass through this intimate space alone, one by one. This isolated encounter, hidden away from the mass gathering outside the monument, appeared as the final instant of experiencing the past in this way. Joining the procession through the mask, I was partly able to experience myself the mystical potential of this moment inside the monument. The people immediately preceding and following me through the reconstructed prison cell were silent and, as far as I could see, carefully tried to get a sense of their 'unusual' surroundings. The protective zone of the monument, speaking in Yampolsky's words, had collapsed under the effect of 'traumatic proximity', sacrificing all spatial and temporal boundaries. Human penetration into the monumental space had finally resulted, even if not for all participants, in a mystical union between people and their spatial-temporal environment. The past had fallen into the present, while the dead were reuniting with the living. What truly happened inside the monument, however, cannot really be expressed through ethnographic description. This ultimate reality inside the Mask of Sorrow remains a privilege of unique communication, leaving behind but a potential silence.

> *…we feel ourselves merging with a place, which on this very account becomes invisible, dissolved in its own luminosity, disintegrated as a discriminate object. We experience this objectlessness in moments of overwhelming joy or fear or abandon… Then place becomes ours at last; but in remembering it, we remain beholden to its intrinsic power. (Casey 1987: 200)*

Remembrance Day of the Political Repressions in Magadan, 30 October 2011

CONCLUSIONS ON THE AGENCY OF PLACE AND MONUMENT

After passing through the monument, most of the participants seemed exhausted. Slowly they made their way back to the bus. Randomly interviewed by the local radio *Magadan Efir* right after the ceremony, some involuntarily burst into tears when they tried to answer the interviewer's questions. They were still under the effect of the event, experiencing the proximity of a past that they had learned to control in their everyday lives but that was now depriving them of their very ability to speak. Most of the interviewees had lived in Magadan for a long time, and most of them had someone in their family, mother or father, who had suffered or disappeared in the Gulag (Magadan Efir, 1 Nov 2011). According to the radio program following the event, 120 petitions had been sent to Magadan in the running year of 2011, usually inquiring about the reason for an arrest that had taken place more than 60 years ago, or asking for a return of personal belongings to the victim's family. The strongest request, however, which mostly remains unsatisfied, concerns the place of a person's burial. The knowledge of where and how a person died seems to be crucial for relatives or friends in order to deal with the person's death. However, people in Stalin's Russia disappeared *en masse* and often under unknown circumstances. The families did often not know where the arrested had been taken to and if they were still alive. According to Etkind (2009), this uncertainty concerning the disappearance of hundreds of thousands of people has created a haunting condition in

[4] The poems were selected from Suzdal'tsev & Panikarov (eds.) *Polius Liutosti* (2010).

which the missed person is neither dead nor alive and can return as a ghost at any time. This return of the dead is usually linked to the experience of particular places that in one way or another relate to the past. The Mask of Sorrow and the Road of Bones clearly follow this pattern of place and memory.

In 1996, the Mask of Sorrow started to function also in compensation for the absence of other official memorials relating to the disquieting loss of so many people. Its main challenge therefore is the problem of anonymous death. Lists of names of victims, compiled from the archives, at last speak evidence of a person's death and testify to the crimes committed in the past. However, the ritual reading of individual names at particular historical sites reaches beyond the matter of documentation. The ritual, above all, confronts its participants with a social catastrophe in the past and attempts to partly convert this catastrophe through social spectacles of memory during which the 'ghosts of the dead' are finally put to sleep. The Mask of Sorrow here functions as a platform for all sorts of people with their own individual memories and beliefs. The monument's distorted face in this process works as a mirror relating to the country's complicated history. Resembling the anonymity of death itself, the Mask of Sorrow renders a kind of creative silence without imposing any narrative from outside. Confronting the past in this rather open way, the sculpture also generates new discourses and therefore participates in the historical process itself. In other words, the monument functions as a creative means of historical exploration, unmasking the historical event and allowing individual interpretation.

I started this text arguing that memory in the aftermath of the Gulag has developed in its own particular context. Under the condition of postcatastrophe, historical representations in Russia do not follow clear narratives, but are dominated by defamiliarisation and silence (Etkind 2009). This silence, however, does not implicate the absence of language and memory altogether. Rather this silence challenges our ways of reading and understanding the past. I have tried therefore to emphasise the role of place and landscape in the communication of time. The Kolyma Road, for example, does not only reveal the physical transport of prisoners to Magadan and to the Kolyma River. As a metaphor (Road of Bones) it simultaneously explores the transcendental journey between life and death. Hereby the road conveys a particular transience of space and time, which is successfully remembered in images and practices of movement, such as the shuffling of hundreds of shoes along the Kolyma Road or the liminal passage through the monumental body of the Mask of Sorrow. Taking its departure from the prisoners' journey into the netherworld of the Gulag, this final commemorative act also represents a historical experience in its own right, an experience that is not only concerned with the past, but one that tries to establish new ways into the future.

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All photographs by the author unless otherwise noted.

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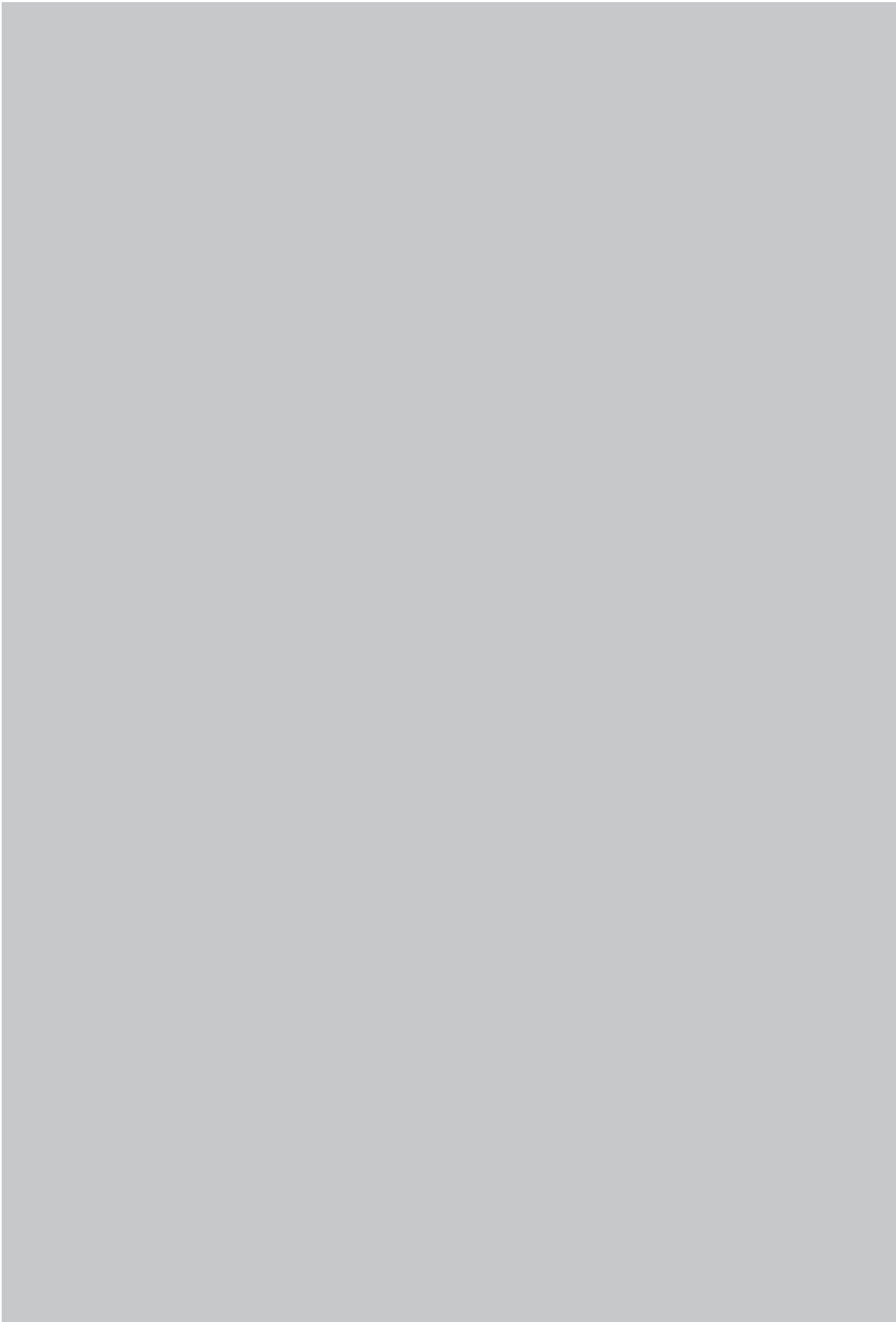
CREATIVE

SUBMISSION

// CREATIVE SUBMISSION //



DEAD PEOPLE'S THINGS

// KATHRYN G. WATT

Once the executors of life's accumulations have extracted the saleable and sentimental,

the leftovers arrive folded, boxed, washed, unwashed:

Beige underwear, elastic a little stretched

(someone could get some use out of these)

The hair comb and old-fashioned manicure set

(not worth holding onto, too practical to rubbish)

A box filled with loose buttons we were going to sew back

(but didn't)

The watch that stopped ticking

A lifetime's worth of Reader's Digest

Bathrobe felted with fine hairs,

pocket stuffed with white tissues

A pair of plastic earrings.

Held to the light

appraised, refolded, divested;

a small stapled sticker denoting price in Rands.

They will be fitted to Other bodies.

The intimately banal relics of our existence

straps readjusted to new shoulders.

Alive again.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kathryn Watt is currently pursuing an MA at the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa. This poem emerged out of her ethnographic research investigating the nature of trade in three charity shops in the Western Cape, South Africa. The charity shops rely entirely upon donated goods, particularly clothing, to sustain their business. Whilst working in the back of the shops receiving, unpacking and sorting donations, she first encountered the leftover belongings of the recently deceased – unwanted by their families, these had been divested through donation. The donations were mostly the stuff of everyday life: of no great value, but not valueless. In the back areas of the charity shops, these leftover objects were laboriously revitalised, their status as commodities made intact once more by brushing away the intimacies of their dead owners. From the shop, these goods would be consumed again, and resume their functional life assisted by other bodies. Resurrected in this way, the objects outlived their former owners, moving between different bodies, homes and states of value.

ESSAYS

// ESSAYS II //

OSSUARIES:

DEATH, RESURRECTION AND THE LIVING

// LAURA TRADII

During my studies on the connections between the Black Death and culture during the Renaissance, I have repeatedly come across a rather obscure aspect of Renaissance Europe which has particularly attracted my attention. I am speaking about the concept of 'ossuary', a room or set of rooms containing hundreds of human bones - often arranged in the most peculiar forms - gradually becoming places of cult activities, charged with symbolic meaning. I find this topic most interesting from an anthropological perspective, because the Black Death had an enormous impact on Renaissance culture and the worldview of European countries. In fact, in a time when medicine could not offer solutions to the recurring epidemics, the response to the disease could only be cultural. I am not arguing that culture is something generated from lack of scientific explanations, but rather that the way in which the disease was approached was reflective of conceptions of self, embodiment and belief which belong to the area of anthropological inquiry. In this article, I wish to illustrate the ways in which a specific aspect of Renaissance culture, namely ossuaries, reflects conceptions of death and resurrection through two relevant examples, the ossuary of the Cimitero delle Fontanelle (Naples) and the Vault of Santa Maria (Rome). I would like to note here that this brief article has been produced not only as a result of visits to ossuaries, but also after consulting original Renaissance sources in which reference is made to the need to deal with the increasing amounts of dead bodies. The most useful tools have been two of Paul Koudounaris' books, in which he has gathered what are probably the most complete collection of pictures and history of ossuaries around the world. These two works mentioned in the bibliography may be of interest for further reading.

As briefly stated in the introductory paragraph, an ossuary is a place where the skeletal remains of human bodies are gathered after exhumation. Their function varied from place to place, meaning that some ossuaries were characterized by a symbolic, rather than a practical, declination. In most ossuaries which did not result from a simple accumulation of cadavers throughout the years, the aesthetic and symbolic elements have acquired a fundamental role.

As is evident in the first photograph (fig. 1), some ossuaries are more than mere storage space for bones. In fact, as bones were gathered in such places after exhumation, it is often the case that skeletal remains were arranged to form the most singular, and even complex, structures to decorate the vault itself, increasing the prestige of the place of worship to which they belonged (Koudounaris, 2013). Therefore, since the term ossuary can indicate both a storage where bones are simply accumulated, and a place where the stored bones are arranged in decorative patterns of varying complexity, we will hereby discuss the implications of the ossuaries of the second symbolic kind which my examples illustrate. Given the stated definition of ossuary, I will proceed to illustrate how these places related to culturally-specific conceptions of death and resurrection.

The ossuary of the Cemetery of the Fontanelle in Naples was characterized by a very singular procedure of attribution of meaning which evolved throughout time as we will presently see. In 1656, the local tuff caves began to be used as mass graves for the victims of bubonic plague. As burial space began to diminish in local cemeteries and churches, bones were exhumed and carried to such caves that are now part of the Fontanelle burial ground. By 1863, when the caves were last filled with the skeletal remains of the victims of a cholera epidemic, a very particular cult had developed around the bones. This cult consisted in the 'adoption' of one of the many anonymous skulls, with people praying for a particular *grace* - or favour - to the dead (Koudounaris, 2011). As the following photograph (fig. 2) illustrates, the faithful would build small structures or make offerings to the skulls to gain the benevolence of the anonymous dead.

The second ossuary I would like to present is the vault of Santa Maria Immacolata in Rome (fig. 3). This example perfectly illustrates the declination of ossuary where bones have been used for decorative and symbolic effect. The bones of 4,000 monks gathered between 1528 and 1870 have been arranged in patterns and figures to decorate the crypt.

A plaque at the entrance reads, 'we were what you are, we are what you will be', a typical *memento mori* warning the visitor of the evident metaphorical value of the place and the imminence of mortality. Therefore, unlike the Cimitero delle Fontanelle, the crypt of Santa Maria has a clear and official symbolic purpose, which mirrors the Catholic conceptions of death and resurrection; the body is but a fleeting shrine, a short-lived container which is doomed to fade and die, freeing the soul. Some of the figures composed with bones - a skeleton holding a sickle and a scale, skull and crossbones - are clear references to the notion of the divine justice waiting for the soul once freed from the caducity of its mortal shell.

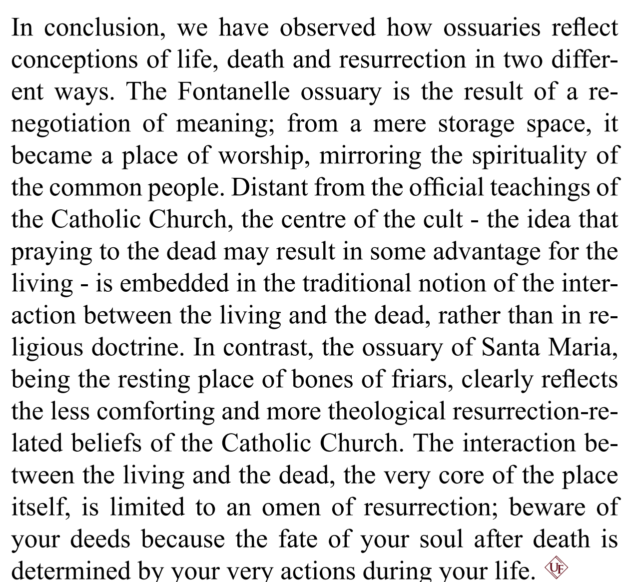
Both the above illustrated examples define two different conceptions of death and resurrection, developed around similar places. In the case of the Cimitero Delle Fontanelle, the meaning attributed to the place evolved through the centuries, materializing itself in a rediscovery of a formerly problematic and shunned area, and in the attribution of a sentimental value toward the unknown dead. The cult developed around the ossuary is therefore embedded in popular tradition and local logics of the relationship between death, resurrection and kinship rather than in Catholic dogma which amount to religious conceptions and symbolism. In the vault of Santa Maria the symbols of separation after mortality are explicit. By contrast, at Cimitero Delle Fontanelle, death, resurrection, and the borders between the living and the dead appear extremely blurred, almost non-existent; the living adopt the remains of the dead and establish with them a connection with the intent of obtaining a favour, a grace, in *this* world, not in the afterlife.

Fig. 1 (left): Sedlec Ossuary, Czech Republic.(Photograph courtesy of Catarine Geer).
Fig. 2 (right): Cemetery of the Fontanelle, Naples (Photograph courtesey of Paul Koudounaris).

Fig. 3: Santa Maria Immacolata, Rome (Photograph courtesey of Paul Koudounaris).

By contrast, in the case of the crypt of Santa Maria, the above-mentioned boundary is clearly marked; the body, its caducity, is the only link between the dead and the living. The plaque itself, reminding the visitor ‘we were what you are, we are what you will be’ is both a moral warning, and an emblem of resurrection, as it hints to the nullity of the body and to the eternity of the spirit. Such a notion of resurrection is certainly of a more intellectual or doctrinal origin than the one which evolved around the Cimitero delle Fontanelle, revealing less about the beliefs of the common people, and more about the understanding of Catholic doctrine and its imposition.

In conclusion, we have observed how ossuaries reflect conceptions of life, death and resurrection in two different ways. The Fontanelle ossuary is the result of a renegotiation of meaning; from a mere storage space, it became a place of worship, mirroring the spirituality of the common people. Distant from the official teachings of the Catholic Church, the centre of the cult - the idea that praying to the dead may result in some advantage for the living - is embedded in the traditional notion of the interaction between the living and the dead, rather than in religious doctrine. In contrast, the ossuary of Santa Maria, being the resting place of bones of friars, clearly reflects the less comforting and more theological resurrection-related beliefs of the Catholic Church. The interaction between the living and the dead, the very core of the place itself, is limited to an omen of resurrection; beware of your deeds because the fate of your soul after death is determined by your very actions during your life.



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ANCESTOR WORSHIP & DISRUPTED CONTINUITY AMONG INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPs) IN GEORGIA

// NANA CHABUKIANI

ABSTRACT // Due to the Russian-Georgian military conflict in 2008, thousands of ethnic Georgians had to flee from their villages in South Ossetia and move to new settlements built for what were now termed internally displaced persons (IDPs). Through displacement, IDPs lost their connection with their places of origin and, consequently, their connection with their ancestry. Based on ethnographic research conducted in the Koda IDP settlement, the article explores how rituals related to the deceased help IDPs sustain belonging to their family lineage. The article illustrates that verbal commemoration, and in particular toasting, gives IDPs an opportunity to maintain presence of the deceased within their social group. While verbal commemoration is sufficient for this, tangible objects also seem to play a significant role. The place of burial and the soil provide an opportunity for the continuation of the social group of the extended family and its constant re-creation.

INTRODUCTION

Darejan's death came as no surprise to her relatives. She was 83 years old and had already been sick for months. She was an 'internally displaced person' (IDP) from South Ossetia and, according to her daughter-in-law, her health suffered greatly after they left their home village. Darejan was buried in accordance with burial customs common for people from South Ossetia. First, the *panashvidi*[1] was organised. The coffin was placed in the middle of the living room, and the chairs arranged along the walls, around the coffin. Family members and close relatives sat on these chairs while newcomers walked around the room, met all the family members and offered condolences. Champagne, water and fruits were on display in the room for the deceased. A candle was lit for her soul. After three days, Darejan was buried. Cars and minibuses took everybody to the cemetery. There, the coffin was placed in the ground. Family members drank wine and toasted to their beloved departed. Finally, Darejan's son brought forth a small fabric bag and spread soil all over the grave. This was soil from South Ossetia, the place where Darejan 'belonged' and the place which she had needed to leave due to the military conflict in the region.

This article tells the story of IDPs from South Ossetia and illustrates how deceased ancestors help the living to keep their sense of belonging to the community – that is, to their family lineage – after being forced to flee their home villages. The article explores the importance of relatives' graves for preserving the IDPs' memory, traditions, and a sense of belonging to their ancestors. It is based on ethnographic research done in the Koda IDP settlement in April-May 2013, which comprised participant observation together with 12 in-depth interviews with IDPs, and illustrates that one of the main ways to keep social belonging to the community is through rituals concerned with death and the deceased such as toasting and visits to the grave. Toasting to the dead plays a significant role in retaining the deceased as a part of social life, while tangibles such as graves are significant since the process of re-creating the ancestral community is believed to be possible only through the soil.

THE AUGUST 2008 WAR AND THE KODA IDP SETTLEMENT

On 8th August 2008, with the first military attack on villages in South Ossetia, the so called five-day Georgian-Russian war began. The conflict concerning the region of South Ossetia (in this article also referred as the Tskhinvali region) first started in the 1990s. South Ossetia is located in the northern part of Georgia and shares a border with the Russian Federation. The first major conflict happened in 1991-1992 which resulted in 251,000 local ethnic Georgians fleeing from the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions (Gamisonia and Pertaia 2009). Tensions arose for a second time in 2004, reaching a peak in 2008 when war broke out and an additional 26,000 people had to leave their homes and received the status of IDPs (Gamisonia and Pertaia 2009).

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) have a special legal status in Georgia. According to Georgian law, IDPs are people who must leave their homes due to a threat to their lives or the lives of their family members. In order to receive recognition of their status, IDPs have to register at the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation (MRA) of Georgia, which then decides whether or not to provide the person with the official status of an IDP. After receiving official recognition of their IDP status, people gain certain benefits: for example, they receive monthly financial support from the Georgian government, they are exempted from utility payments, and are allotted a flat in an IDP settlement.

Such settlements were built by the Georgian government in various regions of Georgia in order to solve the housing problem of the IDPs. According to Transparency International Georgia (2010), 13 settlements were built between October and December 2008. IDPs that previously had to find shelter with their relatives either in Tbilisi (the capital city) or in Gori (the nearest large city to the Tskhinvali region) could now move to flats in these new settlements. One of the IDP settlements was built in the village of Koda, located in the Tetritskharo district in the Kvemo-Kartli region, a 40-minute drive from Tbilisi. According to the Georgian MRA, nowadays there are around 1,600 IDPs in Koda (Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation n.d.). The place where IDPs now reside used to be a military settlement under the Soviet Union. After the August 2008 conflict, the ruined buildings were renovated so that IDPs could use them as flats. There are ten five-storey buildings with three flats on each floor. The flats vary in size (the smallest with only one and the largest with three bedrooms) and were distributed according to the number of family members. The IDPs were provided with a small fridge, a cupboard, a kitchen table and chairs, beds, a wardrobe and a TV set.

ANCESTOR WORSHIP IN GEORGIAN CULTURE

IDPs lead a tough life in the settlement. Unemployment, financial problems and an environment which radically differs from what they are used to are difficulties that they have to face daily. Not being able to practice traditional rituals creates additional dissatisfaction. Burial rituals are especially crucial for IDPs, as their sense of belonging to the family – which consists not only of living members, but also of the deceased – is defined by performing them. Not being able to perform the rituals thus threatens family identity.

[1] A period of several days before the funeral when relatives and friends can visit the family of the deceased and offer condolences.

A building in Koda IDP settlement

A bench and a table next to a grave

Ancestor worship is a common practice in various cultures. For example, Bloch and Astuti (n. d.) write about the existing communication with the ancestors in Vezo, Madagascar. They claim that even though the people are aware that the ancestors are dead, they remain present in the social world of those who are alive and continue to play an important role in the lives of the living by contributing to their sense of identity. As for Georgian culture, Khutsishvili (2009) discusses the importance of the deceased among the living and argues that not only are the deceased a part of Georgian society, but people also keep communication with them through their dreams.

Rituals related to ancestors are firmly connected with material representations of the deceased. Radley (1990) underscores the importance of material objects in the process of remembering. He claims that memory cannot be limited only to its psychological understanding, as remembering is not only something individually specific stored in a person's brain, but also takes place as a social process with material and oral components. Intentionally or unintentionally, people create material objects which live longer than the creators and ensure people's existence after their biological death. Hallam and Hockey (2001) argue that material objects such as photos or graves keep the memory of the deceased alive through practices related to them. According to these authors, various death rituals involve material objects, visual images and written texts which mediate relations with the deceased (Hallam and Hockey 2001: 2). Hallam and Hockey claim that after death, people disappear from the view of those still living, creating a possibility that they might be forgotten (2001:5). As a reaction to this, the living try to create a symbolic representation of dead relatives as an attempt to keep them 'alive'. As the authors put it, 'where material objects are designed as aspects or extensions of persons, they can become potent resources of memories' (Hallam and Hockey 2001:14). Thus, dead people continue to be a part of this world through material objects as they evoke memories.

Material objects indeed played an important role in sustaining the memory of the deceased for IDPs from the Koda settlement. Various belongings of the deceased – clothes, photos, letters, even a dagger – were kept by my correspondents. But the most important material representation of the deceased is their grave. Graves of ancestors have to be treated with respect, visited frequently, and cleaned. Custom requires visiting a grave several times throughout the year. When a person dies, their grave has to be visited on the second day after burial, on the ninth and fortieth days, and one year after death. This timeline is connected to Orthodox Christian doctrine according to which the soul requires 40 days until the Lord judges them and decides whether they should go to heaven or to hell. During these 40 days, the soul approaches God, and on the second and ninth days, it encounters the most difficult crucibles, thus needing special care and prayers from the living.[2] Furthermore, one's grave is visited a year after their death. It is believed that the mourning period should last for one year and the end of mourning is celebrated (Chikovani 1987). After a year has passed since their death, individuals join the other deceased and are visited on various religious celebrations such as Easter, St. Mary's Day and the Ascension of Christ. Whenever one visits the graves, they have to bring food for the dead, make a small *supra*[3] and say *shendoba*.[4]

Graves are not the only sites where Georgians can commemorate their deceased, but also places that create a social space for communication with the dead and become a place where a continued connection with the deceased is possible. Graves are considered to be houses for the deceased (Williams 2003). Thus, visiting the grave means visiting a deceased relative. Manana (female, 56) told me in an interview: "When I used to go there, I had a feeling that I would enter his world, his house… [The deceased] need to have a place somewhere, so that we can visit them. Otherwise, they will be lost."

The grave itself is also constructed in a way that the deceased can easily 'receive guests.' Usually, a table and a bench are constructed near the grave for visitors to sit down and have some food and drink. Nona (female, 40) described how they constructed graves in their previous villages:

> We used to make an iron fence around the grave, so that dogs or other animals could not go inside and spoil it. We would cover the ground across the fence with red soil… beautifully… And we would put a table and benches, so that on holidays, when we would visit graves we could sit there comfortably.

Though Nona acknowledges that the deceased are gone, she also holds that visiting the grave is worthwhile due to feeling closer to the deceased.

Toasts as a Substitute for Graves

After their displacement, IDPs no longer have direct access to the graves of their ancestors, and did not manage to bring with them any material representation of their deceased relatives. They thus cannot perform the rituals in the same way as they did in their home villages. It is obvious that visiting the graves creates a sense of belonging to the family heritage, which is defined by the line of ancestors. It creates a sense of having a certain past, and provides an opportunity for the living to build a future upon it. Losing access to graves was a great loss for IDPs.

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[2] As told to the author by a priest from Tbilisi (interview, 25 April, 2013).

[3] A table with food and wine and/or a dinner which includes not only family members but guests as well.

[4] Commemoration and blessing of the deceased by saying a toast.

As the interviews showed, one of the main reasons for IDPs to return back to their villages is visiting the graves of their ancestors.

However, the IDPs did not lose their connection with the deceased and still maintained them as part of their social world. This became possible through dinners and toasting. Every time friends or relatives get together for dinner, they commemorate their deceased. As Manana (female, 56) said, ‘We talk about them whenever we have guests. We say toasts for them’. The second toast during the *supra* is always dedicated to dead relatives.

Supras and toasting are important parts of Georgian culture. As the Georgian ethnographer Gotsiridze (2007) puts it, the phenomenon of the Georgian *supra* contains elements of people’s religious and social world views. According to him, dinner had a sacred meaning for Georgians, which is still true to some extent: having dinners together is the most frequent way of socialising between people, and by toasting for the dead during such events, the deceased are not only commemorated but also become part of a social interaction between themselves and those who are still alive.

IMPORTANCE OF PLACE AND SOIL

However, according to the respondents graves cannot be substituted so easily. It is believed that the soul of a person stays at the place where they are buried: a soul is attached to the grave. On the one hand, IDPs believe that the soul remains on earth after a person’s death for 40 days, but ascend to heaven afterward, as taught by the Orthodox Church. However, various examples illustrate that souls are believed to stay attached to the place where they ‘belonged.’ This belonging can be created both through living at a certain place and/or being buried there. Abesalom’s (male, 65) example shows that the concept of the soul is not that simple. Abesalom was worried about the fact that his father was buried in their village, while his mother was buried in Koda: ‘They say people meet each other after death… Now [as they are buried apart] how will they meet each other?’ Similarly, Manana (female 59) said that people should not visit the graves of the relatives on Easter as the deceased leave graves for a while also to celebrate Easter somewhere else. Thus, for these respondents, the soul remains attached to the place where a person is buried and continues to exist as they used to in ‘this world.’

A place of burial is essential and people should be buried in their villages. Manana (female, 56) said that a person should be buried in the village where they were born: ‘It is desirable to bury a person at her own place, her village, her land or soil… Whenever I see my husband in my dreams, I always see him in his village…’ For Manana, as for all my respondents, dreams are an important source of information, and, for her, these dreams mean that her husband’s soul remains close to his village.

The respondents relate the importance of place to Christian belief. They argue that according to Christianity, humans were created from the soil: ‘God created Adam and Eve from soil’ (Gela, male, 60). Moreover, the soil is the substance into which humans will transform in the future. It is their future condition – through burial and graves people re-unite with soil. ‘We will also end up in graves, right?’ (Manana, female, 56). The particular soil in their village is what they were created from as well as what they are going to be in the future. This attitude creates a special attachment to the place where people were born:

> The processes of transformation are going on inside the land. This is why one must not lose any territory. Your neighbor’s territory is your neighbor’s territory, and yours is yours. The future has to continue, right? (Gela, male, 60)

Through the soil, IDPs keep a connection with the past and preserve continuity with the present. Descendants come from the soil, while ancestors are transformed into soil after death. A person, his ancestors, and his descendants seem to be parts of the same constantly renewed entity.

The above mentioned understanding of soil creates a special attitude to place. Various authors (David and Willson 2002; Hornstein 2011) argue that place gains meaning through the material culture, architecture, or other objects created by people. However, the case of IDPs from South Ossetia shows that place/soil is important as it itself becomes a material representation of the dead and is a source of unity between the dead and the living.

The unity and continuity with the deceased which was created through place and soil cannot be maintained after resettlement. The souls of the deceased were left behind in previous places whereas the living needed to re-locate elsewhere. Verbal commemoration through toasting keeps the deceased in the social life of the living, but the cyclical reunion of the community is lost. By displacement, the ‘unity’ has collapsed and IDPs have lost their ties with their ancestors.

IDPs were provided with new cemeteries at their new places of residence. However, Koda is not considered the proper place to bury a person. At Darejan’s funeral, the relatives were very sad that they had to bury her at a place where she did not belong – meaning that she was not born there, her ancestors did not live there, and she did not spend her life there. Quite often one could hear the Georgian saying *sadauri sada kvdeba* – quoted to the effect that a person from other part of the country died there, and regretting the fact that the deceased had to be buried in a place to which they did not belong.

Thus, IDPs use alternative ways to bring their deceased closer to the places to which they belonged. Some try to bury their deceased in Gori, which is closer to the Tskhinvali region. Others manage to procure soil from

South Ossetia and scatter it over the graves, as described in Darejan's case in the introduction. However, the new place is still not 'their place.' The special attitude to the soil and place disrupts IDPs and prevents them from fully adapting to their new place of residence.

CONCLUSION

Ancestors play a crucial role in Georgian culture, as they are directly a part of the social life of living Georgians. Graves are places where the commemoration of the deceased as well as interaction with them becomes possible. The South Ossetian IDPs in this ethnographic study have had to leave the graves of their ancestors behind and have no access to them after the military conflict in the region. Lack of access to the graves and no possibility to perform the rituals threatens continuity of the family lineage and the social reproduction of society. The living manage to keep the deceased as a part of their community through toasting during dinners. However, graves are significant as more than just a place where commemoration is possible. Graves are a means of being reunited with the soil. Soil is crucial as it is a source of the future – people are created from soil – and it also represents the past – ancestors turn into soil after their burial. Through burial at the place where people lived, the continuity of the community can be sustained; but this continuity is disrupted by displacement, making it more difficult for the IDPs to adjust to the new place of their residence.

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All photographs by the author.

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BOOK
REVIEW

// BOOK REVIEW //

READING AZIZ'S NOTEBOOK IN 2013

// PARDIS SHAFAFI

Chowra Makaremi: *Aziz's Notebook: At the Heart of the Iranian Revolution*.
Paris: Yoda Press, 2013 (English translation)
(Originally published in French, 2011)

> *'You cannot know or feel what it is like, because you were not there'*
>
> *– Letter from Fataneh Zarei (Gachsaran) to Farzaneh Zarei (Paris) in 1979 (Makaremi 2013: 125)*

Aziz's Notebook speaks to us through the voices of the dead, with memories refracted through other memories. What ensues is a single narrative, one of absence, violence, imprisonment, execution and exile pieced together from different perspectives. We are led into the lives of two sisters, whose political affiliations cause their eventual executions in a post-revolutionary Iran. This is an Iran rife with chaotic power struggles between the (then) newly founded Islamic Republic and opposition activists.

There is a difference between this and other memoirs of the same era, though. It is Makaremi's grandfather Aziz, an elderly man with no political affiliation, who narrates the first, central part of this short work. With concise footnotes, designed to be unobtrusive and orienting, we hear the grandfather talk directly to us about his daughters' demise at the hands of the Islamic Republic. The second part of the book is a window into Makaremi's own journey, her fragmented memories as a child, the absence of her parents, the questions she had growing up in Paris and an anxious reunion with her grandfather Aziz when he comes to visit them abroad. We get a sense that only after his death and with the discovery of the notebook does Chowra see the inner workings of a man who had for so long been troubled by the violent deaths of two of his daughters. His piousness becomes tangled up in these experiences: he literally scrawled the details of his children's torture on the back of a Quran.

> 'They lashed her until her toenails fell off, they slapped her until her ear drums burst, they broke her teeth. All the while they did not allow her poor children to visit her. All this suffering was inflicted in the name of Islam and the defence of Islam. And what happened? Was it the justice of Islam when, after seven years and six months of frantic rushing around prison doors in Bandar-Abbas, Gachsaran, Teheran, Shiraz, they gave me the number of a grave, but no one knows if my daughter is really buried there?' (Makaremi 2013: ix)

By leaving the account raw, in its emotive state, Makaremi's own anthropological sensibilities shine through. Like a painful fieldwork vignette, the piece lies open and awaits an analysis which does not follow; it is not necessary. Nordstrom, an anthropologist who addressed her own approach on the war in Mozambique, discusses the process of lifting analytical frameworks away from such events (Robben & Nordstrom 1995: 18). She declares explanatory categories, drawn up in peaceful working environments and used to explain the absolute chaos of war and violence, to be largely obsolete. Instead, she dedicates time to 'meaning, creativity and imagination as strategies of survival' (Robben & Nordstrom 1995: 18).

This seems relevant when approaching Makaremi's own passages describing childhood memories, dreams, and the epiphanies and discoveries which led to the book's publication. Aziz's Notebook could itself be described as a work of creative survival in this context. As Robben and Nordstrom go on to state in their anthology, violence does not just concern destruction but also reconstruction. There is a regeneration process which accompanies acts of incredible cruelty and it often exists in the margins of the mundane, in everyday existence *despite* the presence of great threat.

During the 1980s in Iran, the threat of violence was a tangible reality for everyone, even those who were not explicitly involved in political endeavours. Being accused of aiding or simply not reporting political runaways and activists could lead to arrest, torture and execution. Meanwhile, a long war raged on with neighbouring Iraq and bombs fell into Iranian cities as prisoners were hanged at the gallows or shot at close range. The climate was one of absolute fear. Beyond essentialised functional explanations for the enforcement of fear and power consolidation, it is plausible to conclude that a direct consequence of such a climate was the silence of many who lived through the era.

TORTURE AND IMPRISONMENT IN IRAN DURING THE 1980S

Although relatively under-reported in academic and popular media, there has nonetheless been ground-breaking work on the systematic torture and imprisonment of those deemed a 'political threat' by the Islamic Republic in the 'bloody decade' of the 1980s. Ervand Abrahamian (1991) and Dariush Rejali (1993) in particular have analysed the role of institutionalised torture in the making of modern day Iran. Far from simple punishment or trying to obtain information from prisoners, Abrahamian (1991) specifically recounts the importance of torture as reform in the Islamic Republic's prisons and the much sought-after recantation, intending to destroy the person and not just the site of ideological conflict itself. As Foucault's vision of modernity showed a shift from torture to imprisonment (Foucault 1977), Iranian modernity subverted the use of torture to create desired citizens, presumably disposing of those who it could not change. *Aziz's Notebook* addresses this through the few prison meetings that take place between Aziz and his daughters. The dialogue between parent and child frequently grapples with the subject of recantation. Aziz recounts his daughters' disgust at the prospect of producing recantations; Fatemeh is even quoted as saying 'a dignified death is worth more than a life of shame' (Makaremi 2013: 73).

Aziz's daughters were not alone. Many prisoners found the process of cooperation with their captors unbearable. But some did concede; and perhaps although it is difficult to accept, this is understandable. From other memoirs,

however, we know that in many cases, even after the recantation was produced, prisoners were kept in the same squalid conditions, hazed by fellow inmates and transformed into a '*tavvab*' or 'repentant'. Worse still, and as Fataneh describes, the process of 'reformation' or 'repentance' did not stop with simply renouncing one's political ties. *Tavvabs* were regularly forced to assault, intimidate and sometimes kill fellow inmates as proof of their new loyalties. Fataneh Zarei recounts this to her father after he pleads with her to cooperate with the guards and to 'confess' (Makaremi 2013: 26).

During my time spent researching on and around the topic of political persecution in the 1980s in Iran, I met a woman who after over 20 years bumped into a *tavvab* who had regularly assaulted her during her long stretch in prison. The woman, who was well respected for her enduring political activism, told me with great regret how she had responded to the *tavvab's* greetings. She had addressed her with bitterness, disgust and anger. 'Her daughter had been with her,' she told me, visibly embarrassed by her own behaviour. What remains amongst former inmates of that period is an enduring hierarchy of respect and shame. The *tavvabs* of the 1980s, it seems, were punished then and are still punished today. The respect, which accompanies the status of former prisoner of conscience, is completely negated for those who in any way collaborated with their captors. These former 'repentants' therefore are confined to a life of silence, shunned by both sides of the political spectrum.

The violence of the 1980s in Iran transcends the prisons and the interrogation rooms, something *Aziz's Notebook* illuminates well. The violence of this era was striking in the way that it repressed public grief and mourning through the intimidation of families, the withholding of bodies and destruction of burial sites. Khavaran cemetery, located on the outskirts of Tehran and the site of the shallow graves of many unidentified political prisoners as well as some known ones, is still an arena of conflict and controversy today. Elderly mothers holding photographs of their loved ones clash with state officials who regularly interfere with remembrance rituals. By criminalising even small incidents of remembrance, the government sought (and continues to seek) popular support as legitimate victors of a fight that it won long ago against the Pahlavi throne. It wrestled (and continues to wrestle) the narrative away from anyone who dared object. Re-considering Robben and Nordstrom's perspective on violence and resistance leads to poignant polemics with regards to mourning families and remembrance both as part of a grieving process and as defiance to state powers.

RECORDING THE REVOLUTION

If producing histories 'legitimates a present order of political and social power', as Paul Connerton discusses in 'The Spirit of Mourning' (Connerton 2011: 1), we may understand the angst of challenging a calcifying state narrative and of the increasing time pressure associated with this. The longer the state narrative prevails, the older the living witnesses to that particular temporal moment become. As personal experiences fade into historical obscurity, away from the geographic borders within which they took place, states simply continue to control what is and is not kept as an 'official chronology' of events. Amongst affected Iranians in the diaspora, some, like those involved with the Iran Tribunal, continue to struggle (increasingly frantically) to establish recorded and documented histories before the narrators themselves disappear. Others, in a manner much like Lisa Malkki's (1995) Hutu informants in Tanzanian towns, draw away from the 'history making' process altogether, considering history, as in Connerton's discussions, to be the domain of the state. In the face of these legitimizing narratives, memoirs and testimonies from those who suffered at the hands of the Iranian state stand perhaps as Lyotard's *petit recits* (Lyotard 1984). Many such challenging *petit recits* or *petites histoires* exist amongst former prisoners of the 1980s. Fewer are written by the family members of the executed and disappeared.

The numbers of such *petits recits* continue to grow, especially those which are becoming translated into European languages. The prison memoir genre has certainly proliferated amongst Iranians following the 1979 revolution (Abrahamian 1991: 15). Some memoirs, like that of Mehdi Aslani, a well-known survivor and activist, continue to sell well (Aslani 2009). This is partly due to his detailed descriptions of a place and time cordoned off from many inmates' loved ones, inmates who did not leave alive and who left no answers as to what had happened to them.

For their families, memoirs of what they deem 'credible' sources are few and far between. There is still an excavation of knowledge taking place amongst the families of the executed, and the prison memoir is one avenue of inquiry. But this is not 'excavation' in some abstract Foucauldian sense; it is a literal attempt to make meaning through a captured temporal experience that is otherwise unattainable. Aziz did not appear to have plans to publish his notebook. He was not dispersing information but rather recording it for himself, in a conversation which regularly spoke directly to God and asked for answers. We as the reader often feel as if we have stumbled across a man engaged in private prayer and lamentation.

Aziz's Notebook paints a sombre picture, of impotent frustrations and the dull grief of parents who did not understand what was happening to their children. With the poetic elegance that seeps into the English translation Makaremi shines a light on the incongruity of each party's experience in relation to the imprisonment and violent death of her mother and aunt, from two very different perspectives – one of a father frantically recording the events that led to his daughters' capture and eventual execution, to a child's memories of a time accented by the absence of her parents; then later, as an adult, working through her grandfather's memory to reconstruct the lost

narrative of her mother and aunt's deaths. We, as the reader, are witness to Makaremi's excavation of knowledge.

Both temporal and spatial journeys follow: the third and final part of the book is a collection of letters written between 1978-1992, between various family members in Iran and Makaremi's aunt who had been in Paris throughout the revolution. Documenting the events preceding and then following the revolution, we walk through a historical moment with an inevitable sense of dread. Like stills taken in the midst of absolute commotion, we notice the mundane and the spectacular fused together as seamlessly as in real time. From Fataneh's longing sentiments as the wheels of unrest had started turning in Iran, in 1978:

> '…This year Papa and I squeezed the lemons for the juice and we missed you… It was the same for the tomato preserves. Do you remember, last year you helped us prepare the lemon juice?' (Makaremi 2013: 122)

To her chilling final letter in 1982, as she prepared for what turned out to be (on that particular occasion) a mock execution:

> 'They say that before his death, a human being feels that the time to leave has come; with all my being I feel I will only be alive for a few more hours…' (Makaremi 2013: 140).

Fataneh Zarei did not make it to the summer of 1988, the notorious peak of the executions of political opposition members, coinciding with the end of the Iran-Iraq war. But we continue to creep through the bizarre decade in Aziz's memory of his other daughter Fatameh's imprisonment until the October of 1988. Then the story changes course after news of Fatemeh's execution reaches him. The death toll during this period included minors and the elderly, some of whom were there simply due to their familial affiliations or for having accepted a pamphlet in the street containing prohibited information. Illiterate men were murdered as American spies, and young girls were raped to eliminate virginity and be denied entry into heaven. Some guards even forcibly 'married' female inmates. The 1980s was a decade of such stories. Chowra Makaremi's lens magnifies the people behind the political event, shining a light on its survivors – their stories of heartbreak and torment, the torment of not knowing. We do not think of Fataneh and Fatemeh as political activists so much as they are the daughters of a religious man desperate to make sense of a nonsensical situation. We think of Fataneh Zarei, recently married, widowed and pregnant. We envision Fatemeh Zarei, rarely allowed visits from her two young children, and even deprived of light.

Aziz's Notebook is difficult to read because each of the narrators is palpably recognisable. An old man, weathered by angst, a young girl led through a migration and returning to Iran as an adult. These are the stories which root the Iranian diaspora in a conflict which is largely unknown to outsiders. Like a public secret, these stories become buried under the years that have contained them. As Linda Green points out, being 'socialized to terror' does not imply either a constant state of alertness nor an acceptance of the status quo. It is instead in a state of 'low intensity panic' (Green 2004: 186) which sees chaos 'diffused' in the body and manifested in chronic illness and recurring dreams. These events live on in the bodies of those who transcend them.

COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND ENDURING LEGACIES

The truth is that what happened in 1979 and the decade that followed shook the generation that experienced it, whether they stand by it still or renounce it completely. They were a part of something that grew out and beyond them. Monstrous and out of their control, it turned back and swallowed them whole. Fatemeh Zarei's home visit in 1988, the visit she herself had described as her first and last meeting with her family, is peppered with advice she gave to her sisters. Among this, she tells them: 'However much we believed we were Iranian, Iran didn't belong to us, we knew nothing about this society. Now we are paying the price' (Makaremi 2013: 68).

William O. Beeman said that 'few societies are as invested in the search for their own identity as Iran' (Beeman 1996: 876). Perhaps considering the nation's tumultuous history, this is unsurprising. A kind of enduring 'Axial age' (Jaspers 1948) has plagued the nation since the revolution of 1979. Diaspora Iranians tend to look back the most. A discussion of why is neither relevant nor surprising here. At least partly this is because we have the luxury to do so. But there are other factors at play. We are displaced, we are longing, and we are strangers to the homelands we visit, read about, see on television or, as Makaremi has done for this book, conduct research on. Perhaps the most literal analogy is found within *Aziz's Notebook* itself, as Makaremi describes in painful detail having her grandfather's notebook read aloud by her surviving aunt to allow her to record its contents.

Academically, the work does instigate wider discussions about Truth and Reconciliation Commissions – the supposed antidote to social forgetting, usually occurring in the context of a power change. Iran has seen no such change, but a Truth Commission was established in 2012 by the victims' families and survivors of the 1980s in Iran. The so-called 'Iran Tribunal' was and is centered on the 'bloody decade' of the 1980s. Structurally, this historically significant movement (where Makaremi herself provided a testimony) could be viewed as an attempt to air silenced grievances, perhaps a collective effort at previously suppressed grief. The partakers, of course, demanded far more than such simple emotive results. A formal legal framework and expert witnesses aimed to show what was described in the final judgement as human rights violations committed on a 'widespread and

systematic basis' (Iran Tribunal 2012). It is this distinction, and the use of the word 'systematic', which encourages further legal and international enquiry. Within this framework, the deaths of Aziz's daughters were not random acts of violence. They were not accidents or a case of mismanaged incarceration during the chaos of war in Iran. Their deaths are located in a purposeful and strategic killing of political opponents who presumably posed an existential threat to the revolutionary government of the 1980s, which endures up to the present day.

Currently, the Iranian state continues to deny any wrongdoing during their time in power. It is widely discussed in diaspora activist groups that the younger generation currently residing within Iran does not know or perhaps care about the events that preceded them. While it is true that the current conditions in Iran mount multiple pressures (political, economic and social) on Iranian society at all levels, the continuity in regime oppression is often overlooked. Perhaps even those who recognise the wrongdoings of the revolutionary government consider the 1980s massacres to be confined to history, preferring to focus on more 'contemporary' problems like current gender inequality and international sanctions.

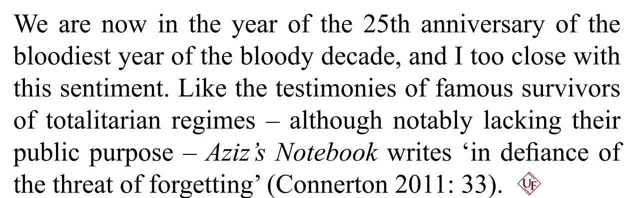
The fact remains, however, that former judges, torturers and executioners of the 1980s have held prominent positions in governmental structures up to the present day. Even popular 'liberal' president Rouhani recently appointed Mostafa Pourmohamadi, the notorious former member of the 1988 'Death Commissions' who sentenced hundreds to execution in 1988, as the Minister of Justice (Iran Human Rights Documentation Center 2013). This is an irony of bitter proportions and does much to distance affected diaspora Iranians from reformist debates in Iranian politics. It is these continuities that partly radicalise calls for regime change amongst the Iranian diaspora, even those who may visit Iran regularly.

Amongst the heterogenous and fragmented Iranian diaspora, a common idea about the discourse of the Islamic Republic's violence permeates discussions, demanding that it be uprooted completely before democracy can ever be successfully cultivated. A government who began its reign exterminating political opposition and proceeded to reward the most gruesome offences with medals of power and authority is considered to require complete overhaul and not trivial title changes, no matter how quaint president Rouhani's tweets may be or how congenial the government appear in the course of sanction lifting.

To some extent the generation that has reached adulthood with Makaremi, touched by the same traumas, undergoes the same processes of knowledge excavation as she did. We look for narrators of a place and time we are far removed from. We look to survivors of the revolution to build whole, sensory images of the place and time that pulled us out of the ground and replanted us elsewhere. We want to recreate the faces that have long since faded during this decisive period. But unlike academic sources – rife with paranoid chronology and fact collation or the memoirs of those who fought for the revolution that punished them – Aziz provides a touchingly personal account, free of romance and political ideology.

Addressing perhaps the most written-about era of contemporary Iranian history, fraught with the victory narrative of the revolution and the eight year 'sacred defence' against Saddam's army and allies, this account is located very much at the opposite end of macro analyses. Aziz is not looking to explain himself nor make political forecasts. Makaremi herself says of his act of recording as an example of 'history penetrat[ing] individual lives' (Makaremi 2013: 115). Revolutions in general and the events that ensue do just that to countless people who are inscribed with their memories.

Collectivity in this suffering has, however, never truly been achieved amongst Iranians in the diaspora. Fear, political conflicts, shifting priorities and indifference all play important roles in the silence of those who lived beyond that temporal moment. For this reason, *Aziz's Notebook* is a special reminder about how far and wide the trauma truly scattered, and how many voices were silenced in the process of rebuilding their own lives. There are many unpublished stories within the Iranian diaspora which echo that of Aziz. Makaremi recalls his negation 'may it not remain unspoken' (Makaremi 2013: xiv), and indeed this is the position he adopts throughout the whole work.



We are now in the year of the 25th anniversary of the bloodiest year of the bloody decade, and I too close with this sentiment. Like the testimonies of famous survivors of totalitarian regimes – although notably lacking their public purpose – *Aziz's Notebook* writes 'in defiance of the threat of forgetting' (Connerton 2011: 33).

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