

Remains of a former village institute in Turkey: Memory at the border of Voluntary and Involuntary

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ABSTRACT: The paper focuses on Village Institutes, schools that were established in the early years of the Turkish Republic and had an integral part in the nation-formation process of Turkey. The purpose of this paper is to inquire how a former Village Institute in a Tatar village is remembered by its graduates, village inhabitants, and people who are nostalgic to the enlightenment ideals these schools represented. The paper is based on an ethnographic study, which includes interviews conducted with the former students, the elderly in the village, and the members of an NGO called YKKED (*Yeni Kusak Köy Enstitülüler Derneği*) “New Generation Village Institutes Association”. This paper investigates the voluntary practices to remember these schools, yet also discusses the possibility of involuntary memory in modern times by approaching the ruins of the former Village Institute as an affective space.

KEYWORDS: Turkey, Tatar, identity, village, nationalism, education, memory, affective space, nostalgia, material culture

How do we remember the past in present conditions? Do the politics and poetics of today change how we see yesterdays? How does material culture relate to our perception of the past? Can memory still create stillness in the progress and forgetfulness of modern times? Based upon these questions, in this paper, I will present my research about the ruins of a former village institute, a school which



holds a significant place in the history of Turkey and discuss memory and nostalgia in and for modernity within this framework.

Village institutes are schools that were established in the early years of the Republic of Turkey, with the idea of educating the youth in the villages of Anatolia and engaging the minority population in these villages with the ideals of modernity. My own village Hamidiye, a Tatar village in Eskisehir, was home to the first village institute in Turkey, *Cifteler Köy Enstitüsü*, which was later transformed into a teacher-training academy and is today reused as a vocational high school for agriculture while most of the buildings on campus are in ruins. In order to understand the relationship between memory and material culture, I will approach this school as a regional site of memory and focus on how it is remembered today by its graduates; the nostalgia it creates both for the former students and the Tatar community in the village; the non-discursive sensations its ruins arouse; and the role of archival efforts that aim to protect the remains and memories of the school by bringing the possibilities of the past and present together. With the intent of developing a multilayered perspective, this paper uses an analysis of written records on village institutes as well as ethnographic research, including interviews with the graduates who stay connected to the school through a non-governmental organization called YKKED (*Yeni Kusak Köy Enstitülüler Derneği*) “New Generation Village Institutes Association”; the village inhabitants who have seen the school in its many forms and still encounter it in their daily lives; and finally with my father who guided me through the ruins of the school as a graduate of the academy himself.

In this paper, I will first explain the distinguishing characteristics of village institutes, how they reflect the civilizing mission of the Turkish elite in the early years of the Republic and why they are significant in the history of Turkey. This background information is necessary for understanding the political views and nostalgic feelings of the actors who aim to revive the teachings of these schools. Alongside this, I will draw upon the interviews I conducted as well as my experiences in the village and with the non-governmental organization to grasp the nostalgia of the graduates and village inhabitants for the former village institute in Hamidiye. I will argue that despite the controversial mission of these schools, it is still remembered fondly due to the grievances about the current political conditions and longing for a modernity ideal not fulfilled completely. For this reason, I will explain how the Tatar village inhabitants and graduates highlight their present grievances in-

stead of past and remember the past in glory by either suppressing their former bad memories or labeling them as personal as opposed to systemic grievances. In this nostalgic evocation of the past, I will claim that their memories of the school are at the border of voluntary and involuntary, objectivized and subjective. These actors' memories of the school of Hamidiye are deeply connected to their longing for childhood days in the village, which are remembered involuntarily through the senses aroused by the ruins of the school; at the same time, their memories uncloak their past and present grievances in the politics of Turkey, which is why they take the act of remembering as a duty against the threat of cultural amnesia and turn their nostalgia into action through the books they publish or events they organize.

Village Institutes: Civilizing the “Anatolian Other”

“It would be impossible for you to go alone, I am not even sure if there will be anyone *I know* who still stays in the village...and I grew up there” (personal communication, December, 2016). That’s what my father said when I told him about my intentions of going to our village for research. He had not visited the village since we left Eskisehir to move to Istanbul eleven years ago; therefore, when he agreed to come with me, he was both excited and anxious at the same time, for our journey together has been a journey to his childhood as well. The avenue which greets the visitors at the entrance of Hamidiye was covered in snow when we arrived, which made the village look even less familiar under its white blanket. My father was shocked by how much had changed since he left, how taller the willows had become, but calmed down before long and started to describe his years in the village to me. The stories from his childhood, his days at the school, and his experiences as a Tatar peasant boy have helped me make sense both of the history and material culture of the former village institute.

When my father was sharing his experiences as a student in the teacher training academy in Hamidiye, he repeatedly told me: “I want you to understand the difference...The kids raised in these schools were amazing, like a firework! The new generations were coming like a thunder, civilized, well-informed, cultured... They blocked it” (personal communication, December, 2016). To assert the difference of these schools from the education system of today, he described his sports,

literature, history, and art classes. He explained how they would produce their own paints and canvases in the atelier for the painting class, or how every single student knew how to play a musical instrument. But apart from all these, he insisted on the importance of knowing and sharing the history of village institutes, since for him the foremost value of these schools lied in their civilizing mission which became the reason why they were abolished.

Village Institutes, schools that were established in several villages of Anatolia in 1940, are *sui generis* in the educational history of Turkey due to their pioneering role in the cultural, technological, and literary development of the villages as well as the ideologies they represented. The “learning by doing” method (Kocak & Baskan, 2012) of these institutes is considered unique as a schooling practice, in addition to their self-sustaining policy which includes the joint work of teachers, students and villagers for constructing the buildings or providing food for the staff and students (Vexliard & Aytac, 1964, p.44). However, the reason for the nostalgia for these institutes is less their teaching method than the ideals they became the symbol of: mainly the enlightenment ideals of the early Turkish Republic. These ideals are embedded in the efforts of the Turkish elites in this era for civilizing the society, which includes the use of education as a tool for this goal (Arayici, 1999, p.268) and has its roots in the modernization process of the Ottoman Empire.

Ussama Makdisi (2002) focuses on the repercussions of Western portrayals of the East in the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century by explaining the Turkish-Ottoman elite’s “explicit resistance to, but also implicit acceptance of Western representations of the indolent Ottoman East” (p.768) and their idea of an Ottoman modernity which aimed to bring the empire into coeval position with the West. He explains the Turkish-Ottoman elites’ projection of themselves in a Muslim modernized self by defining their degraded Other within the empire, which was the Arab periphery that became the “Ottoman man’s burden” (p.777) for changing into a modern Ottoman identity. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, there appears a similar sense of response to orientalism in the Republic of Turkey. In a similar manner, the Turkish elite of the early years of the Republic undertook a civilizing mission with an attempt to “westernize” the society, which necessitated secularizing the conservative society they inherited (Zurcher, 2004, p.185–86). Within this context, I argue that Turkey also formed its own Orient as a response to the western representations of itself by casting the role of being “backwards” to

the “uncivilized” masses in Anatolia while distinguishing the Turkish elite as the “vanguards of civilization” (Gurpinar, 2012). In this regard, the Anatolian periphery appeared as the Oriental Other as opposed to the modern Turkish citizen, which made it necessary for the latter to penetrate into the lives of the former with a civilizing mission.

Promoting a national identity was crucial for counterbalancing the internalization of western ideas and thinking; however, Anatolia was falling behind to adopt the “Turkish historical thesis” as well as the national identity (Zurcher, 2004, p.191) and the Turkish elite was unable to address the rural population in Anatolia which constituted 80% of the population at the time (Kucuktamer & Uzunboylu, 2015, p.393). Moreover, the policymakers were convinced that the regions which spoke Kurdish, Arabic, etc. had to be ‘Turkified’ for the sake of creating a unified Turkish identity (Karaomerlioglu, 1998, p.64). Village institutes enabled the Turkish elite to reach the rural areas of Turkey, improve the villagers in scientific, social, cultural and economic fields, and raise teachers who could spread what they had learnt to other villages of the country.

These particularities of village institutes started to disappear from 1947 onwards because of the restrictive measures of the state (Arayici, 1999, p.275) which led to the transformation of these schools into teacher-training academies in 1954 and gradual degeneracy after that period. The reason for the loss of state interest in the continuance of these institutions is controversial. Some argue that the increasing literacy level resulted in the decrease of votes for the ruling party (Gunduz, 2016, p.260), which induced them to withdraw their support from the project. Others contend that the educational principles of these schools led them to be labeled pejoratively as “communist nests” in the society (Kucuktamer & Uzunboylu, 2015, p.396). Some even go further to argue that the “backward” population collaborated with “the West” to block the progression that institutes pave the way to, due to their modernizing and civilizing role (Karaomerlioglu, 1998, p.62). This conspiracy theory regarding the abolishment of these institutes can find occasion even in one of the most widespread newspapers in Turkey, as in this quote from one article among many:

Every graduate of the village institutes had an impressive intellectual background. But as Europe came out of war, it looked at Turkey and saw that it had

a working educational project that would improve the country a lot, so decided to ruin it...along with the internal powers that helped it, of course. (Izci 2012)

As seen in this example, Europe appears as a uniform, coherent unity, along with the “internal powers” which refer to the “backward” segments of the society that aimed to block the progression of Turkey.

The nostalgia for village institutes today reflects, in a sense, this longing for modernity in present sociopolitical conditions, in which the “backward” and “non-secular” segments of society are considered to be in power. The political arena in the post-1999 era, integral to today’s sociopolitical conditions, can be interpreted as the re-emergence of the political actors that represent the Anatolian periphery, who could not be “enlightened” or “civilized” through the modernization project of the Republican elites. “In the post-1999 period in Turkey, we observe two shifting hegemonic positions in the Turkish political discursive field: namely, the popularization of elitist state nationalism, and the formation of neo-conservative and neo-liberal political Islam” (Kucuk, 2009, p.100), which also explains the position of the Justice and Development Party that has been in power since 2002. Considering that the Republican elite regards Islamic fundamentalism as one of the biggest threats against the Turkish modern national identity, because of its contradiction with the notion of secularism, some perceive the rise of political Islam as the rise of the reactionary powers in Turkish society. Esra Ozyurek (2006) defines this transformation as the increasing visibility of Islam in public places and party politics since the 1990s and explains the secular block’s yearning for a pristine past and their way of privatizing the secular state ideology of the early Republican days. She describes how the latter “sought modernity in the single-party regime of the 1930s”, which sheds light on the nostalgia for the village institutes that represent these values of modernization as well.

Although there is a significant literature on the unique characters of these schools and their founder, romantic portrayals of those times, or their influence in civilizing the youth (see for example, Turkoglu, 2000; Makal, 1979; Tonguc 1970), there are not enough studies on the influence of these education policies and modernization processes on the minority students or the villages they were founded in. To understand the relationship of these actors with the institutes and their nostalgia for the bygone days, in the next chapter I will focus on the memories of

the graduates and village inhabitants in Hamidiye and how they see the past in present conditions.

Nostalgia for the past – How is the past remembered in present conditions?

“They are going to waste themselves, poor kids. What good could come from this kind of an education, what can they possibly learn like this, what are they going to be when they graduate?” (personal communication, December, 2016). My father’s memories of the teacher-training academy aroused nostalgia not only for his past as a student but also for the opportunities the school offered its students, for he compared the conditions of the vocational high school with that of village institutes as we walked around the school (Figure 1). For most of the graduates of the village institute or the teacher-training academy, the essence of the school was lost long ago, along with its high-quality education and spirit. My father told me that the value of the school decreased after the village institutes had been transformed into teacher-training academies, but the principles and opportunities of the former were sustained in the latter for a period of time, as he remembered his days as a student fondly. He compared his own education to the one that current students have as we paid a visit to the new greenhouse that the vocational high school had opened for their students to learn agriculture (Figure 2). “Look at this greenhouse. It’s not even built on soil, it’s on sand. Poor kids think they are going to learn something. They will ruin these kids” (personal communication, December, 2016). His pity for the



Figure 1: Photograph of the main building of Yunus Emre Vocational High School, taken from the official web-site of the school: yunusemreaol.meb.k12.tr



Figure 2: Photograph from the interior of the greenhouse, taken by the author

students or his critiques of the vocational high-school were related to his critique of the educational policies of the current government; and his nostalgia for the past was deeply connected with the unfulfilled wishes village institutes symbolized: civilizing, modernizing and educating the youth. These unfulfilled wishes and the symbolic role of village institutes could be considered in relation to the concept of “uchronia” that Portelli (1991) introduces, which depicts an “alternative time” that could have been possible if things worked out differently. In a similar manner to my father, the graduates of this school that I have talked to perceive village institutes as a missed opportunity that could have transformed the society into “civilized”, “modern” nation-subjects. Considering their grievances of the present conditions and the way they perceive themselves as “modern, well-versed individuals” as the graduates of these institutes, their longing for an alternative present becomes even more clear.

While describing the relationship between modernization and Girls’ Institutes of the early Republic, which were founded with similar intentions and in the same time period with village institutes, Aksit (2005) explains how these girls were expected to bring the ideas of modernity to their homes and describes it as a way to carry the creation of collective memory into the households. In a similar manner, the influence of the former village institute in Hamidiye is not only seen on the graduates but also on the whole village community. I had a chance to inquire about the relationship between the school and the village inhabitants at the next stop of our journey, which was the coffee house of the village that can be regarded as the gathering place of the male villagers of Hamidiye. The coffee house is central to the village, where men come together almost every day to talk, play card games, watch TV, and drink tea (or sometimes beer). Due to the gender segregation in the village, the coffee house is considered a public house for men, while women usually get together in houses. This segregation is common to most of the villages in Turkey and requires more inquiry, however, for the integrity of this article as a whole, I do not intend to go further into this discussion. Although it is well accepted, this norm is not that strict in Hamidiye, considering that I was able to drink soda and watch my father play card games with his friends there when I was a little girl, and I was welcomed again during our visit for my research. When we entered the coffee house, my father was relieved to see some of his old friends and introduced me to them since I became almost a stranger to the village over

the years. After the initial introduction, my father started to get reacquainted with his old friends while I had a chance to talk to the regulars of the coffee house.

The village inhabitants in the coffee house had nostalgic evocations of the past when I asked what the school meant to them, and compared the village institute back in the day with the high school of today. As the school used to have a deeper connection with village life and people, it held a significant position in the lives of the community. For the villagers, the degeneration of the school caused the children of the village and their families to move to cities for better education and has been one of the factors for the dissolution of the integrity or the depopulation of the village. While talking about their relationship with the school, the inhabitants not only belittled the education of the vocational high school but also devalued its teachers. An 80-year-old teacher, who has lived in Hamidiye for the most of his life, argued that the “teachers of the vocational high school did not know the true meaning of their occupation” (personal communication, December, 2016). According to him, the jobs of the teachers should not be constrained to the classroom, but they should also be motivated to educate the local people around the area. In this respect, he argued that village institutes occupied a different place within the educational history of Turkey, as these schools gave importance to educating the village inhabitants along with the students.

Here, we used to sit and talk in the coffeehouse with the teachers. Back then, they used to come here almost every day to spend time with the peasants. They knew that what’s important is to educate local people. Today, I don’t even know the teachers of the vocational high school personally. They don’t come to the coffeehouse, they don’t talk to us. They run to their shuttles when their shift is over. (personal communication, December, 2016)

His critique of the teachers of the vocational high school was not only a longing for a more ‘organic’ and ‘communal’ life, but also a longing for the days in which education was perceived as a means to civilize and educate the masses in rural areas, as promoted by village institutes at the time. Pierre Nora (1989) argues that “our relation to the past is now formed in a subtle play between its intractability and its disappearance, a question of representation” (p.17). His claim of looking at the past in relation to its disappearance is relevant to the comparisons made

by graduates and the village inhabitants between the village's and the school's past and present. The way people remembered their past was deeply related to their present beings, histories and subjectivities, which influence the way they approached the material culture as well.

With the help of these educational policies of the early Republic and their reflections on the everyday life, Aksit (2005) claims that the different languages and ethnic backgrounds of the Ottoman Empire have been forgotten throughout the years, for these communities started to relate their backgrounds with a Turkic past. She argues that the contradictions of gender, class, or ethnicity with the ideals of the nation-state were solved through the silence of the students about their conflicting sense of self. This situation can be well observed in my village Hamidiye, which is significant for being a Tatar village since the 1770s. Tatar ethnicity and language are known for belonging to a Turkic family, however the particularities of the culture have been lost into a modern Turkish identity today. In this respect, I contend that the contradictions faced by the village inhabitants and graduates of Hamidiye were solved not through silence and forgetfulness but misconception. Whereupon, they related their past grievances about the disappearance of their language and culture with the personal misconducts of certain teachers or family members rather than the policies of the early Republican state. Today, both Tatar graduates and village inhabitants remember village institutes and teacher-training academies fondly. Due to the relationship between remembering village institutes and longing for the disappearing ideas of enlightenment represented by these schools, the interviewees' memories of the school reflect mostly and dominantly the positive aspects of their past. Although these graduates and village inhabitants were not reluctant to talk about their memories of the village institute or teacher-training academy, non-pleasant stories came to light only towards the end of our conversations. When I asked them about their Tatar identity, the graduates told me how they almost forgot speaking Tatar language after the school and how their children do not know the language at all. One of the graduates of the teacher-training academy, a 60-year-old Tatar woman, remembered a long-forgotten memory when I asked her what it was like to be from a minority culture in these institutes.

I have almost forgotten about it until you asked. You know, our parents used to speak in Tatar language when we grew up. That's why we had specific accents

when we spoke Turkish and sometimes few Tatar words used to slip out too. One of our teachers, oh that horrible woman, forced us to put a coin in a jar every time a Tatar word came out of our mouths. (personal communication, December, 2016)

Many graduates told me how their parents stopped speaking Tatar language at home as well. “Because our parents did not want us to be ashamed for not speaking Turkish good enough or be bad at school because of language” said one of the graduates and added “You know Tatar people, they think too much about how they will be seen by others” (personal communication, December, 2016). Although these graduates are upset about the disappearance of their language, they do not blame the village institute but find specific teachers or parents guilty about it.

Ahiska (2010) makes note of the “historical patterns of forgetting”, as in the case of the Tatar population, and explains “the involvement of force in the prohibition of memories and in the fabrication of a national memory, and the impact of denial and repression on everyday life by way of building a certain habitus” (p.8–9). In this sense, Tatar graduates of the village institute and village inhabitants have nearly forgotten their non-pleasant stories regarding these schools, reflect the fabricated narratives of the early Turkish Republic into their daily lives and approach the past with its glory. Lowenthal (1985) suggests that “Nostalgia is memory with the pain removed. The pain is today. We shed tears for the landscape we find no longer what it was, what we thought it was, or what we thought it would be” (p.8). Indeed, both the village inhabitants and the graduates of Hamidiye focus on their present grievances about the state policies and ideologies while looking at the past as it is deprived of anything wrong. Furthermore, even if they are saddened by the loss of their language or culture throughout the years, they do not blame the Turkification and modernization policies of the early Republic but point at certain people of their own private history for the wrongdoings, as for them village institutes arouse nostalgia with the pain removed.

For Pierre Nora (1996), people mourn for the past as they long for sensibilities they can no longer reach in the present and contends that “Memory is constantly on our lips because it no longer exists” (p.1). He argues that in modernity “real memory” has been replaced by history, as people have lost their sensibility and embodiment of the past. To explore the question of how the former village institute is remem-

bered in present conditions further, in the next section I will focus on the material culture of the school in Hamidiye, the concern of cultural amnesia in modernity, and how people dutifully work to remember and remind this glorified past in Eskişehir.

Voluntary memory – Village institutes in written records, anniversaries and associations

When the school bell rang at noon to mark the end of the school day, I had a chance to see how the students and teachers interacted with the buildings of the former village institute. Some students made a snowman right in front of the former atelier, the rest snowballed right next to the old bathhouses, while the buildings of powerhouse and furnace were the areas around which the teachers smoked after class. Moreover, most of the walls of the buildings of the former village institute were covered with graffiti and scribbles (Figure 3). Nature found her way around, covering the buildings with snow and shrubbery, as well as students and teachers who found their way around by making those places part of their daily lives and creating new memories. The material culture of the former village institute was taken for granted by the teachers and students of the vocational high school. The



Figure 3: Photograph from the exterior of the former laundry plant, taken by the author.

life in the buildings used by the vocational high school carried on carelessly, and the ruins were just regarded as part of the natural habitat. Assmann (2014) talks about how nature may de-historicize places if nobody intervenes and also regards the reuse of buildings as an effective way of forgetting the history of the spaces (p.135). In the case of the school of Hamidiye, both nature and the appropriation of the buildings have a role in explaining the indifference towards the ruins of the school. I believe that the reason for this forgetfulness lies in the progress and structural changes, which as Connerton (2009) says, triggers the type of forgetting which is characteristic of modernity (p.5). Following Assmann's and Connerton's insights

I argue that the history of the material culture can be forgotten if nobody voluntarily tries to remember it, although, as I explain below, a potential for involuntary eruptions of progress is always possible.

While considering whether there is an urge to remember these schools and the ideologies they represented collectively, I discovered the non-governmental organization YYKED (*Yeni Kusak Köy Enstitülüler Derneği*) “New Generation Village Institutes Association”, an organization that reflects the reactions of the secular segment of the society. It was founded in 2001, corresponding to the post-1999 era when neo-liberal political Islam emerged and replaced the elitist national identity. One of the old friends of my father was an active member of the school, who recommended me to come to their office and make note of their efforts and activities. The YYKED is a non-governmental organization, founded for resurrecting the values of village institutes, withstanding against the forgetfulness of modern times, and working for an alternative future derived from their past and present grievances. The establishment of this new organization aimed to gather people who think alike and is a response to the threat of cultural amnesia against the values of village institutes. In their founding declaration, the association states the reasons for their establishment as follows:

We, as sons, daughters, grandchildren, ideological partners of the graduates of village institutes, will carry the values, enrichments and intellectual accumulation of this era into the new age...For making intellect and science prevail in our society, for a democratic society, for a society that is freed from bigotry, we will combine the enlightenment ideas of 1940s with science, technology and art, enrich them with new values and present them to our society. (“Kurulus Bildirgesi”, 2001)

Their statement makes it clear that they not only aim to resurrect the values of these schools, but they also have a purpose for new generations. They aim to create an alternative future by transforming their mourning for the unfulfilled desire of civilization and modernization into action. Theirs can be regarded as “restorative nostalgia” in the sense that these actors try to “rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps” (Boym, 2001, p.41), aim to use the past for transforming the present and their nostalgia for forming new relations.

My father's friend, a 60-year-old graduate of the teacher-training academy who introduced me to the organization, was proud to be a member of this organization and also eager to inform me about their activities and mission. She told me, "There is also an anniversary event you should attend. We come together as graduates on the first Sunday of July, every year at the school. It is our duty to do this. At least once a year!" (personal communication, December, 2016). For her, attending these anniversaries or other events of this association should be practiced as a duty towards the institute that raised her to be the person she is today, which is why she insisted that I had to persuade my father to become a member of the organization as well. She explained to me how she took it very seriously to remember the stories of village institutes since these values are disappearing today. Nora (1989) says that "Lieux de mémoire originate with the sense that there is no spontaneous memory, that we must deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce eulogies, and notarize bills because such activities no longer occur naturally" (p.12). There is a similar understanding of memory in the practices of the YKKED and the views of the active graduates who attend these events.

In order to understand the motives and perspectives of other members who take an active role in resurrecting the disappearing values of village institutes, I participated in a meeting of the Eskisehir branch of this organization and conducted interviews with the members. There were eight people in the small office of the branch gathered together for an emergency meeting on a snowy day. All of those in the room were graduates of the teacher-training academy, which they defined as the 'new generation village institute'. After an introduction from the president of the Eskisehir branch of the NGO, an 83-year-old graduate of the Cifteler Village Institute took the floor, who was the one to demand the emergency meeting. He was preparing a book about the foundation and closure of the village institutes with a specific emphasis on the one in Hamidiye, including the memories of the graduates of both the village institute and the teacher-training academy. His intention was to explain the transformations of the school, what has changed from the day it was founded until the closure of the teacher-training academy.

Much valuable information was lost along with our respected graduates of the village institute. My purpose here is to protect the memories of you, who gradu-

ated from the teacher-training academy. Your children, grandchildren, will look at this book and say ‘So, that is how the school was like when my father studied there.’ (personal communication, December, 2016).

He argued in the meeting that the new book would be written from an “institutional perspective”, for he aimed to distinguish his books from memoirs or subjective, personal written records. He thought that the written records should present objective truths about the past, because of “the need for documenting and protecting the history of village institutes”. A discussion about how “facts” produced by written records might not be objective is beyond the scope of this paper, however it’s worth noticing that the archival efforts for the protection of these memories are expected to be neutral and objective, and they represent the kind of archival memory in modern times that Nora (1989) discusses. However, the relationship between documenting the past and the feeling of responsibility towards the future generations should not be disregarded in these archival efforts and the practices of the association, which could be defined as a ‘spectral response’. As Ahiska (2006) suggests:

An archive, in fact, stands at the border of history and memory. On the one hand, it provides exteriority, a trace for accounting for the past and, therefore, becomes an objectivized site for writing history; on the other hand, an archive has subjectivity in the sense that it provides a spectral response to those who are in search of the past time...It is as if one expects the dead in the past records to speak and answer one’s questions about the present and the future...the spectral response does not only bring the past into the present, but it also gives a promise to the future, as it bears a responsibility for tomorrow. (p.21)

With this responsibility for tomorrow, the activities of YKKED involve publishing books, magazines and articles about the history of the institutes, organizing scholarships and competitions for maintaining the spirit of village institutes, and organizing local or national events for the graduates of village institutes and teacher-training academies (“Faaliyetlerimiz”, n.d.). For understanding how village institutes were represented in the written records, I analyzed the books offered to me by members of the organization to help me understand the history and

memories related to village institutes and teacher-training academies. During my inquiry, I realized that these written records not only document the nostalgia for these schools on paper, but they also express a need for change and transformation in the society. In one of the books, the current situation of the former village institute in Hamidiye is described as follows:

...with its powerhouse that is about to wrack, its tailrace that no longer carries water, its old willows that have lost their colors and vividness, its fall of water weir whose gurgling lingers in the past, everything reflects the sorrow of abandonment. (Kucukcan, 2012, p.29)

The author calls for action to resurrect the buildings and memories of this school. The book reflects the nostalgic view of the glory of the village institutes, accompanied by a deep sorrow for the abandonment of its buildings. For the author, the abandonment of the institute is deeply connected to the abandonment of the values of village institutes, which he fears to be lost along with the institutes themselves. He argues that:

If what is left of the Cifteler Village Institute of Eskisehir, the city which has two universities today, gets lost in this desolation, the first thing the next generations do will be to turn their questioning glances onto our universities. (Kucukcan, 2012, p.33)

This sentence clearly reflects the fear of cultural amnesia, loss of the memories of village institutes and their values; for the author argues that forgetting them will drive the next generation to question the importance of education and universities altogether. The call for saving the Çifteler Village Institute is also a call for change in the sociopolitical conditions of Turkey, in order to “save” the youth.

The remains of the Cifteler Village Institute is a regional site of memory and as Assman argues “the culture of memory is not only a responsibility that is delegated to the state but also a democratic concern of civil society” (2014, p.143). I suggest that, because of the indifference of the state and new generations – who are not familiar with village institutes – towards the remains of the values and buildings of the school, these graduates try to do their part to bring the past into the

present. The role of this non-governmental organization should be seen as a way civil society gets involved in the culture of memory and aims to shape the present with its engagement. However, is it really true that nothing is left of the former village institute in Hamidiye today? Is memory in modernity constrained with dutiful remembering and archival efforts, as the sensations or embodiment of the past is no longer in question? With these questions in mind, in the next section, I will trace the affective sensations the ruins of the school may arouse, and discuss the possibility of involuntary memory in modernity.

The school as locus – Its role in evoking involuntary memories

There is an ongoing debate in memory studies about the possibility of resisting the progress and forgetfulness of modern times and whether memory can create stillness in this flow of change. For Pierre Nora (1989), there is a distinction between “real memory” and history; the former refers to an affective, magical kind of memory that emerges unconsciously, whereas the latter is the representation of the past in modern societies which takes the act of remembering as a voluntary act to be compulsorily conducted within a continuous temporality (p.8). On the other hand, authors like Benjamin (1969) or Seremetakis (1994) suggest that there is opportunity to find rupture in the continuum of history or there are alternative epistemologies in modernity and problematize the clear-cut distinction between history and memory. In my opinion, the boundary between these two notions is ambivalent, for remembering in modern times is caught between spontaneous moments of stillness and conscious practices of reconstructing the past through archival efforts or intellectual production. Although the material culture of the former village institute is taken for granted by the students and teachers of the vocational high school or taken out of its past context and history through forgetfulness and appropriation, I contend that there are still involuntary sensations aroused for those visiting the ruins and especially for graduates like my father who had a deeper connection with this space.

Cifteler Village Institute, later known as Yunus Emre Teacher-Training Academy and today known as Yunus Emre Vocational High School, bears within it “layered commensal meanings and histories” (Seremetakis, 1994, p.10), considering its

place in the memories of teachers, students or villagers from different generations. Two buildings of the former village institute are used by the vocational high school for agriculture today, one for the classrooms and one for the dormitory. The rest of the campus is spread to a large area of the village, including the former theater hall, bathhouse, ateliers, furnace and powerhouse of the institute (Figure 4), all



Figure 4: Photograph from the interior of the former powerhouse, taken by the author.

with broken windows and walls and peeling paints. Seremetakis (1994) suggests that “The sensory landscape and its meaning-endowed objects bear within them emotional and historical sedimentation that can provoke and ignite gestures, discourses and acts” (p.7). The influence of the sensory landscape of Hamidiye was evident in my father’s gestures as well, which made him nervous but animated and

filled him with stories to tell throughout our entire journey. While approaching the abandoned buildings disguised in snow and filled with dust and wind, I had an uneasy feeling, unlike my father who colorfully recounted the earlier periods of the

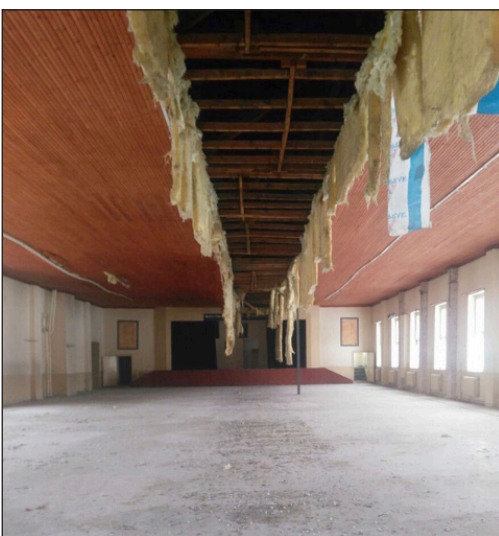


Figure 5: Photograph from the interior of the former theater hall, taken by the author.

places. I felt as if we were seeing different things when we looked at the ruins; I was seeing the present state of the spaces, but he was reliving his past memories by looking at the same place. My father found a “stillness in the material culture of historicity, against the flow of the present” (p.12) which was out of my reach. While we were at the theater hall, I asked him what he thinks about the broken upholstery and the mats drooping drearily from the ceiling (Figure 5). Uninterested in talking about the present conditions of the building, he moved on and started to describe how the theater hall used to smell urine on the weekends

when he was young. He told me that two movies were screened on the weekends, available to everyone in the village; children were left no choice but to wet themselves in those days, as the hall had no toilets, and they did not want to pay again to go out and come back inside. While listening to the stories my father vivaciously told, I realized that these spaces were naturalized for my father who spent his years there and formed memories that arrive involuntarily to him, in spite of the transformations the school went through. The stillness that my father found himself in, with time at a standstill, also shows how the “history is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous empty time, but time filled by, the presence of the now (Jetztzeit)” (Benjamin, 1969, p.261). There, while looking at the broken upholstery, I was also able to see that there is a possibility to detach from the progress and transformation reflected on the school brought by the continuum of history.

It was also possible to see my father’s projection of his ‘self’ onto the school, which can be considered a locus for him (Connerton, 2009, p.20). Considering that my father was in connection with the school since his early childhood through the movies or plays the village inhabitants attended, and later through his years there as a student, one can talk about the shared history of the school and my father’s sense of self. For him, the school actually shaped him into the person he is today. The influence of the place on my father’s self became more clear when I asked what the school meant for him. He told me that the most important role of the school was that it turned a peasant boy into a modern, well-versed individual, which he realized when he attended the university after the academy to be an ocean-going captain:

They [his friends who grew up in Istanbul] were always surprised about the things that I know. Peasant boy, how come you know that actor, there is no way that you could have seen his play! But well, I did. All the movies would be presented in our theater hall, right after the big cities. Our village would be the first stop of the theater plays when they went on a tour. Peasant boy, please don’t tell me that you can play mandolin as well! They were surprised by everything I know. But everyone in the teacher-training academy would play an instrument, do sports, watch movies, theaters, everything. They don’t expect it from a peasant boy, of course. I noticed that I am no less than them, I was not simply a peasant boy. (personal communication, December, 2016)

His personal growth is intertwined with his years at the school, and his personal history is reflected on the material culture itself, as he could still see where he played the mandolin on the stage for the first time or where he watched that specific actor's play.

The material culture of the former village institute can be considered as a sensational environment which has the potential for evoking memories involuntarily. Yael Navaro-Yashin (2009) describes affect as "the non-discursive sensation which a space or environment generates" (p.13) and underlines, "If persons and objects are assembled in a certain matter, I would argue that this is not because they always, already, or anyway would do so. Rather 'assemblages' of subjects and objects must be read as specific in their politics and history" (p.9). Keeping these ideas in mind, I claim that the memory of village institutes cannot be discussed without referring to the politics and history of these schools or the subjectivities of the people I have talked to. Concordantly, my father's connection with the place in terms of building his sense of self cannot be thought apart from the penetrating nation state that helped him create his "modern, well-versed" self. Even though the ruins cannot be approached as an affective space without their relation to the subjectivity of the person who encounters it, it is not possible to disregard vivid memories that reminded my father of the smells, visions, and feelings of his childhood. These aspects of our journey reflect the times of stillness in modern times when memory can still be approached through involuntary remembering, gestures, acts and sensations. Following these observations of my father, it can be asserted that there is an intimate relationship between place and memory. Encountering a place that is loaded with memories and stories always already evokes prior senses and feelings for someone who can relate with this place through his subjectivity, which reveals the relationship between space and involuntary memories.

Conclusion

In this paper, I argued that village institutes should be approached in relation to the civilizing mission of the Turkish elite in the early years of the Republic. In this respect, these schools had to be examined through their role in westernizing the Anatolian periphery and integrating it into the Turkish national identity at the same time. In my research, it was possible to observe how Tatar village inhabit-

ants and graduates were integrated into this national identity and enlightenment framework. Thereupon, while remembering the past of the former village institute, they focused only on the positive aspects of their memories and looked at the past in relation to its disappearance. Although most of the Tatar people in my research had almost forgotten their language or had other unpleasant stories about the school, they typically emphasized their present grievances instead while remembering village institutes fondly. Their present grievances involved not only the disappearance of their language, but also the depopulation of the village, loss of the communal life of both the teachers and the villagers, and the disappearance of the enlightenment discourse. Within this context, they connected most of these grievances to the degeneration of the village institute, which was integral to the education, gatherings, and cultural activities of the village. Moreover, I think that these grievances are also related to the discrepancy between the modernity that village institutes were supposed to pave the way to and the modernity they live in; because the latter carried along forgetfulness and cultural amnesia with it, and threatens to erase the values and history of the village institute. Today, the type of modernity that the former village institute promised represents an *uchronia*, an alternative time that could have been possible if things worked out differently.

Despite this flow of change in modernity, I argue that memories of the former village institute of Hamidiye are at the border of voluntary and involuntary. In this regard, both my father's memories that were aroused involuntarily and the institutional form of voluntary remembering that characterizes the YKKED should be taken into account. The former is worth noticing, because both in the gestures that were provoked during my father's encounter with his childhood and in the stillness that he found that allowed him to bring his past into the present, one can see that there is still a possibility in modernity to detach from the continuum of history and progress. However, it is also necessary to make note of my father's subjectivity and the influence of the enlightenment discourse on his sense of self, which he expressed clearly when he explained how he was transformed into a "modern, well-versed citizen-subject". Therefore, I think that affectivity and subjectivity, as well as history and memory, should be drawn together to understand the relationship between memory and material culture.

On the other hand, the YKKED's practices of recording and documenting the memories of village institutes can be defined as "archival-memory", and the aim of

the graduates for maintaining the values and histories of the school through anniversaries can be regarded as “duty-memory”. I approached these actions both in terms of the role of civil society in the culture of memory and as derived from “restorative nostalgia” that corresponds to the use of the past to transform the future and the resurrection of the values of village institutes for future generations. Consequently, following Ahiska, I contended that these archival efforts of the organization bring a “spectral response” into the present and “reconcile the conceptions and possibilities of the past with the conceptions and possibilities of the present” (Ahiska, 2006, p.22). Therefore, even the institutional form of voluntary remembering, offered by this organization, problematizes the boundary between past and present, history and memory.

Pierre Nora (1989) claims that modern memory is archival and experienced voluntarily as a duty with the responsibility of remembering; therefore is no longer collective or spontaneous (p.13). In opposition, I argue that there isn't a clear-cut difference between “real memory” and history (p.8), but that this boundary is ambivalent. On the one hand, in modernity there is the act of remembering as a duty, voluntary memory, remembering as “history that binds itself strictly to temporal continuities, to progressions and to relations between things” (p.9); on the other hand, there are still nostalgic excursions to the past, involuntary revelation of sensory memories, and expose of performances through acts, discourses or gestures in the sensory environment. As Seremetakis (1994) contends, “social transformation is uneven. And it is this unevenness, the non-contemporaneity of the social formation with itself, that preserves and produces non-synchronous, interruptive articles, spaces, acts and narratives” (p.12). It is because of this unevenness of social transformation that a place like the ruins of a former village institute can both evoke non-discursive sensations for my father and also motivate the members of the YKKED to create institutionalized, “objective” knowledge about its history; and it is because of this possibility for detaching from the flow of change that the memories of the former village institute are at the border of voluntary and involuntary, objectivized and subjective.

Lastly, I would like to mention a few limitations of this paper, along with the aspects that require more research. First of all, I would like to state that I intentionally did not indicate the names of the participants or reveal the identities of the interviewees, for the sake of privacy. Secondly, it is crucial to make note of the state

of emergency in Turkey in between July 20th, 2016 and July 18th 2018 that hindered some aspects of my research. For instance, because of the state of emergency, the manager of the vocational high school stated clearly that I could not be doing research or recording anything within the boundaries of the school; thus, my research lacks conversations with the current teachers and students of the school who could have provided a different insight about the topic. Lastly, I believe that there is a need for more research in the other villages of Anatolia that were home to village institutes, and the influence of the civilizing mission in the early periods of the Republic on other minority cultures.

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