

EXPLORING MEMORY THROUGH ORAL HISTORY IN TURKEY

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This chapter explores the construction of notions of self and belonging among youth from different cultural backgrounds in Turkey through the way the past is represented in life history narratives. The aim is to interrogate the concept of 'Turkishness' or national identity in Turkey. This study is centred on the life history narrative of Gülümser Kalik, a twenty-nine-year-old single young woman from Tunceli in eastern Turkey, now living in Istanbul. In her narrative, Gülümser constructs a timeless image of her village, an image posed against the painful flux of migration. Gülümser's identity as a gendered person conflicts with her identity as the member of a collectivity; a conflict generated by the memory of opposition between this collectivity and the state. Thus, for Gülümser, her cultural origins are part of the material through which she interprets the past, constructing her story (and sense of self) in 'personal time' which is coeval—though often in conflict with—'collective time' and 'national time'.

REMEMBERING THE REPUBLIC

The new millennium includes globalisation/transnationalism, the eroding of the nation-state (notwithstanding new or revitalised nationalisms), the emergence of new communication technologies, the expansion of the cultural domain exemplified by the rise of identity politics, the emergence of the 'new' subject/citizen and a changed relationship to time and space.¹ Today, structures of power increasingly operate in the cultural domain and through the 'body'.² The

¹ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996 and J. Boyarin, ed., *Remapping Memory: The Politics of Time-Space*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.

² Bryan Turner, *The Body and Society*, London: Sage, 1996.

'new subject', therefore, rather than the collectivity, has increasingly become the axis of contemporary debates on identity.³ The question facing contemporary society is whether postnationalist democracies, embodying a notion of citizenship based on the acknowledgement of (cultural) difference as directly linked to civic rights, will emerge.⁴ This concern helps explain the current preoccupation with belonging, and in particular, with the way the past figures for and in the present.⁵

The rise of identity politics and the growing centrality of the subject/body as the axis of identity have resulted in a rediscovery of oral/life history,⁶ a growing interest in other means of self-expression through text, image and performance⁷ and in a proliferation of theories of narrative and performance.⁸ Research on memory confirming the presentism of human memory⁹ has given added impetus to research on oral history based on a narrativist/hermeneutic perspective,¹⁰ one which views narrative as an ontological condition of social life. A narrativist perspective can avoid a categorical approach to identity by including in the conception of identity/self the dimensions of time, space and relationality such that identity is viewed as process, as *becoming* through performing and narrating multiple selves.

With older adults, the usual subjects of life history research, the axis of the narrative tends to be located in the past, usually in the formative period of youth as emphasised by Mannheim in his classic study of generations.¹¹ For young people—oriented as they are

³ Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps, 'Narrating the Self', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24, 1996, 105–40.

⁴ Veit Bader, 'The Cultural Conditions of Transnational Citizenship: On the Interpretation of Political and Ethnic Cultures', *Political Theory*, 25, 6, 1997, 771–813.

⁵ John Borneman, *Belonging to Two Berlins: Kin, State, Nation*, Cambridge University Press, 1992.

⁶ Alessandro Portelli, 'The Battle of Valle Giulia: Oral History and the Art of Dialogue', University of Wisconsin Press, 1997. For an early, pathbreaking study of subjectivity based on life history see Vincent Crapanzano, *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan*, University of Chicago Press, 1980.

⁷ Celia Lury, *Prosthetic Culture: Photography, Memory and Identity*, London: Routledge, 1997.

⁸ Douglas Ezzy, 'Theorizing Narrative Identities', *Sociological Quarterly*, 39, 2, 1998, 239–42.

⁹ David Rubin, ed., *Remembering our Past: Studies in Autobiographical Memory*, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

¹⁰ Margaret Somers and Gloria Gibson, 'Reclaiming the Epistemological "Other": Narrative and the Social Construction of Identity' in Craig Calhoun, ed., *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*, London and Oxford: Blackwell, 1994, 37–80.

¹¹ Karl Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952.

towards the present and the future—the past, in so far as it exists, gains significance primarily in terms of the present. Since memory tends to work this way as well, life history research on youth is a useful means of exploring how the past is reconstructed.

Research on memory is of particular significance in the Turkish context due to the discourse and experience of Turkish modernity. The Turkish modernity project tended to discount the everyday experience (including memories) of ordinary persons in its attempt to create a single national identity within a historically multicultural geography.¹² Legislation on the measurement of time, on dress, on language, and the creation of a new ‘national’ education system focused on building new rituals of public (and personal) life and new ways of thinking, feeling and being.¹³ But other ways of being persisted; co-existing and often conflicting with the Republican idea of personhood. The Turkish modernity project resulted in a gap between public (and written) discourse and the commonplace experience of Turkish citizens.

Like ethnography, oral history research makes it possible to bridge the gap between everyday life and public culture, and between lived experience and social analysis in Turkey. Life history also opens the way for the study of subjectivity, an area much neglected in Turkey due to the preoccupation with collective identity, epitomised by the ‘Republican generation’; educated youth sharing the ideal of transforming society in their own image.¹⁴ Oral history makes it possible to explore how ordinary persons from diverse backgrounds viewed this bold and costly social experiment, how they variously believed in it, contributed to it, opposed it; how they positioned their own lives and the lives of their families vis-à-vis the national project. In short, how they lived: in tandem with the national project, outside it, or in conflict with it?

Education, and therefore youth, played a central role in the Turkish social engineering project aimed at creating a homogenous population with a single shared identity.¹⁵ Youth, the cornerstone of Turkish modernisation, were also among the first to rebel. Alternative political projects to the left and right of the political spectrum have in recent

¹² Sibel Bozdoğan and Reat Kasaba, eds, *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997.

¹³ Yapi Kredi Kültür Sanat Yayıncılık, *Bir Yurttaş Yaratmak*, Istanbul: Yapi Kredi Yayinlari, 1998.

¹⁴ Mina Urgan, *Bir Dinazorun Anilari*, Istanbul: Yapi Kredi Yayinlari, 1998.

¹⁵ Ismail Kaplan, *Türkiye’de Milli Eğitim Ideolojisi*, Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1999.

decades been overtaken by identity-based movements, including Islamist, Kurdish and Alevi political projects, as well as by the actions of increasingly vocal individuals (and citizens' groups) who have begun to make their own claims for the recognition of (cultural) difference and of the rights of citizens in an ostensibly democratic state, particularly through the new media.¹⁶ Youth, who embodied the Turkish 'revolution' at the time of the establishment of the Republic, have since become a sizeable proportion of the population at the same time as increasing access to education and delays in age at marriage and in entry into the job market in recent years have led to the extension of youth as a life stage, coupled with the emergence of 'youth cultures'.¹⁷

The Turkish experience with modernity resulted in a radically changed relationship of persons to space. For those raised in urban areas, the locales of their childhood have been transformed. For those from rural areas now living in cities, their villages often live on primarily in memory. Rural-urban as well as transnational migration has meant that most youth are cut off from the spaces of their childhood and/or the places of allegiance of their parents, which affects their sense of time (and of the past). For second generation migrants in global cities, their relationship to place has no historical depth; many circulate between several locales, nomads calling no place (or all place) 'home'.¹⁸ For young people, the uncertainty associated with their economic futures and their sense of belonging have made this liminal stage of the life cycle ever more uncertain, a time of neither-here-nor-there outside the realm of adult public culture.¹⁹

A LIFE HISTORY NARRATIVE FROM EASTERN TURKEY

Gülümser Kalik was born in 1970 in the village of Aşkirik in the Pülümür district of Tunceli (formerly Dersim) province in eastern Turkey. She lived here until completing primary school. In 1981, she

¹⁶ A. Aksoy and K. Robins, 'Peripheral Vision: Cultural Industries and Cultural Identities in Turkey', *Environment and Planning, 1937-1952*, Dersim. Tiflis, 1997.

¹⁷ Leyla Neyzi, 'Youth in the Middle East: A Research Agenda', paper presented at the 'Study Group on Youth in the Middle East: Population Processes and Cultural Constructions', Cairo, Nov. 19-21 1998.

¹⁸ Azade Seyhan, 'Ethnic Selves/Ethnic Signs: Invention of Self, Space and Genealogy' in Valentine Daniel and Jeffrey Peck, eds, *Immigrant Writing in Culture/Contexture*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996, 175-95.

¹⁹ Henry Giroux, 'Doing Cultural Studies: Youth and the Challenge of Pedagogy', <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/courses/ed253a/Giroux/Giroux1.html>

went to live with her married brother in Izmir in order to attend high school. In 1988, she migrated for the second time, this time to Istanbul, where she lives at present with her married sister, working as a secretary for a private firm. Gülümser cannot return to her village, which has been largely destroyed by the war between the Turkish state and the PKK (Kurdistan Worker's Party). Her relatives and co-villagers are scattered throughout Turkey and the globe. Her parents live in Izmir and her siblings in Istanbul, Ankara, Bursa, Izmir and Canada. Gülümser, who attends the open university, would like to study fine arts, but so far her circumstances have not made this possible. In her spare time she draws, both by hand and on the computer, as well as reads extensively on cultural topics. I interviewed Gülümser formally on three occasions, although the interviewer-interviewee relationship gradually developed into a joint project to which Gülümser contributed autobiographical writings, poems and artwork as well as reflections on my own writing about her.

If national identity is defined with reference to 'Turkishness',²⁰ Gülümser is distinctly an 'Other'. She describes herself as 'Alevi'²¹ and 'Kurdish'²² as well as from a region (Dersim) historically identified

²⁰ This, of course, is the primary question in contemporary Turkey. How was/is national identity defined, and how might/ought it be revised in the present? The experience of Turkish modernity points to an identification of national identity in practice with Sunni Islam in the sense of community of origin. Turk is commonly used in everyday language to mean Muslim or rather, not non-Muslim, following historical divisions based on religious community. The discourse of Kemalism, on the other hand, is ambiguous and open to different interpretations (Ayşe Kadioğlu, 'The Paradox of Turkish Nationalism and the Construction of Official Identity' in S. Kedourie, ed., *Turkey: Identity, Democracy, Politics*, London: Frank Cass, 1998; Tanil Bora, 'İnşa Döneminde Türk Milli Kimliği', *Toplum ve Bilim*, 71, 1996, 168–92; Büşra Ersanli Behar, *Iktidar ve Tarih: Türkiye'de 'Resmi Tarih Tezinin Oluşumu, 1929–37*, Istanbul: Afa Yayinlari, 1992; Etienne Copeaux, *Tarih Ders Kitaplarında Türk Tarih Tezinden Türk-Islam Sentezine*, Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1998). In different periods and contexts, the discourse of nationalism variously emphasises citizenship, shared values, territory, language, ethnicity or religion. While a source of serious contention, the fact that ambiguity is a defining feature of Turkishness as a constructed identity harbours also the possibility of a new consensus in the present.

²¹ Alevism is a syncretic belief system incorporating elements from pre-Islamic beliefs as well as aspects of Shiite Islam and other monotheistic religions. Historically, Alevism has been defined in opposition to Sunnism as well as being identified with opposition to central authority (Tord Olsson, et al., eds, *Alevi Identity*, Istanbul: Swedish Research Insititute, 1998). The identity of the Zaza-speaking Alevi of Dersim is distinct from that of other Alevi in Anatolia. The Zaza language, as well as historical evidence point to Armenian influences, as well as to a pantheistic belief system (see Ertuğrul Danik, 'Dersim Alevi-Kürt ve Zaza Mitolojisi ve Pantheonu Üzerine', *Birikim*, 88, 1996, 64–7).

²² Referred to and variously referring to themselves as 'Kurdish', the Zaza-speaking

with a major rebellion against the Turkish state. In this sense, Gülümser's life history narrative makes it possible to explore the construction of self and belonging in a collectivity that has had a historically ambivalent relationship to the Turkish modernity project.

However, rather than viewing this narrative as 'typical' of an 'Other' identity representing an imagined unitary collectivity, it is preferable to analyse Gülümser's story as a unique performance, a creative take of the self/body as simultaneously 'subject position' and inventor. This approach grows out of a critique of the concept of culture in a poststructuralist, transnational era, where it is increasingly individuals who embody identities rather than collectivities.²³

To understand Gülümser's identity, not only her cultural origins and relationship to the national narrative but her identity as a gendered person²⁴ and as the member of a generation need to be considered.²⁵ For Gülümser, her identity as a gendered person tends to conflict with her identity as the member of a cultural collectivity; a conflict generated by the memory of opposition between the collectivity and the state. Gülümser's discourse is also more personalised than that of previous generations who tended to differentiate less (at least in discourse) between their identities as persons and their collective identities.²⁶ For Gülümser, her cultural origins are part of the material through which she interprets the past, constructing her story (and sense of self) in personal time, which is coeval—though often in conflict with—collective time and national time.

Alevi of Tunceli nevertheless differentiate themselves from the Alevi Kurds of Dersim (*Kirdaş*), the Kurmanci-speaking *şafi'i*, and the Zaza-speaking non-Alevi, preferring to underscore their Alevi identity, their region of origin and their language as the basis of their cultural identity. Historically, the Zaza-speaking Alevi of Dersim referred to themselves as '*Krmanc*'; '*Dersimli*', meaning 'from Dersim', is increasingly used at present (Seyfi Cengiz, 'Dersim ve Dersimli', *Desmala Sure Yayinlari*, 1995, Martin Van Bruinessen, 'Aslini Inkar Eden Haramzadedir' in Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, et al., eds, *Syncretistic Religious Communities in the Near East*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996).

²³ George Marcus, *Ethnography through Thick and Thin*, Princeton University Press, 1998.

²⁴ S. Leydesdorff, et al., *Gender and Memory*, Oxford University Press, 1996.

²⁵ Ron Eyerman and Bryan Turner, 'Outline of a Theory of Generations', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 1, 1, 1998, 91–106.

²⁶ See Leyla Neyzi, 'Beyoğlu-Beşiktaş. Ferruh Doğan Çocukluğum İki İstanbul'unu Anlatıyor', *Istanbul Dergisi*, April 1998 and her 'Hem' 68'li Hem Karadenizli', *Istanbul Dergisi*, July 1999. In this context, the issue of subjectivity among younger members of social movements in Turkey needs to be explored in greater detail (Nilüfer Göle, 'Gendered Nature of the Public Sphere', *Public Culture*, 10, 1, 1997, 61–81).

Gülümser's narrative lends support to the argument that it is not only those viewed (or who view themselves) as 'Other', but potentially all individuals (citizens), and the younger generation in particular, who are experiencing a crisis of belonging given the current crisis of the state in Turkey. As we shall see, Gülümser's own means of dealing with her existential crisis has been to build a personal network within which difference and hybridity, both cultural and personal, is not only acknowledged but valued.

In her narrative, Gülümser constructs a timeless image of the 'traditional' village, an image she opposes to the experience of migrant families in exile. This image is represented in the drawings she makes of the village on the computer. It is significant that oral tradition and memory are transformed thereby into a visual image. Gülümser deals with the repression she feels imposed on her by her family in the city by using the image of her carefree child self as the basis of a personal identity in which she acknowledges her cultural origins with reference to space. Rebelling against family and collectivity, she is yet bound to place and origins through the image which she creates on the computer. This is the village the way she remembers it in the present. But it is also modelled on oral tradition and the experience of tolerance in the world not of her parents but of her grandparents, when different collectivities co-existed in the space of Dersim. Might such memories of an imagined prenationalist intersubjectivity provide a blueprint for a postnationalist social contract in this geography?

MEMORY AND PLACE

This section explores the ways in which Gülümser constructs the past in her narrative through the image of her natal village, which is also the 'space' of her childhood. Like other recent migrants in Istanbul from eastern Turkey, Gülümser was born in a rural area. Ironically, some of the new 'nomads' circulating in a transnational world²⁷ have been forced to migrate as a result of new or revitalised nationalisms, often concretised by civil war. Since Gülümser cannot visit her village, she views herself not only as a migrant, but also as an exile within national borders. Because there is no village to return to, memories of her childhood in the village have become an important reference point for Gülümser's attempt to construct a sense of self in the present.

²⁷ Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg, eds, *Displacement, Diaspora and Geographies of Identity*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996.

Gülümser's life history includes a number of different narratives of her village. These include a narrative of the Dersim rebellion (based on her memories of the oral account of her maternal grandmother who lived through 1938), a narrative of the 'traditional' village (in which memories of her childhood blend with memories of her grandmother's account to create an 'ethnographic present', a mythic village as a sacred space), a narrative of her own experiences as a child, and a narrative of the village as it exists today.

At the beginning of our interview, in response to my first question concerning her life story, Gülümser referred not to her birth date, but to a date that turned out to be of greater significance to her life history: 1938. As I came to find out, the year refers to the violent suppression of local resistance in Dersim to the centralising impulse of the Republican state in 1937–8.²⁸ Subsequently, survivors were exiled to other regions of Anatolia; Dersim (renamed Tunceli) remaining uninhabited for a decade. For Gülümser, the memory of 1938 is an indirect one, based on the oral narratives of elders, particularly her maternal grandmother, who recounted her harrowing experiences to her granddaughter in the form of stories. Through these oral narratives, a familial and collective memory of this central event in the history of the province was passed down; a narrative distinct from (and opposed to) the national narrative. It is thus that Gülümser's time-scale begins in 1938: in the very formation of her being, her identity is separate from, and opposed to, national identity. Her notion of time, or of history, then, is constructed on the basis of a dichotomy between 'national time' and 'community time'. Gülümser's story shows how repression created the opposite of what was intended. Despite the fact that the people of Tunceli have tended to identify with a staunchly secularist version of Kemalism, 1938 has been branded into the memories of individuals, feeding the insecurity of a minority identity in the present. We will see below how the memory of 1938 leads Gülümser to construct her own migration as a second migration (and second exile).²⁹

At the same time, though, as seen below, Gülümser speaks in her narrative of a third 'personal time', which emerges out of her conflictual relationship, particularly as a woman, with her family and

²⁸ M. Kalman, *Belge ve Tanıklarıyla Dersim Direnişleri*, Istanbul: Nujen Yayinlari.

²⁹ Other informants from Tunceli have made an even older link, reminding us of the last words of Seyit Rıza, the legendary leader who was hanged in 1937. In his last words, Seyit Rza made reference to 'Kerbela', the incident which symbolically marked the break between the Sunni and Shiite traditions.

community. Gülümser's 'personal time', the time (and space) of her body as a gendered person, is out of sync with both national time and community time. Viewing the experience (and performance) of telling her life story (as well as drawing and writing autobiographical texts) as part of a quest to enlarge the space of her 'personal time', Gülümser became a willing participant in this research project on identity in Turkey.

COLLECTIVE MEMORIES

This is how Gülümser speaks of 1938:

'For '38 they say, "Let God not bring back those days, let God not will it upon anyone." My grandmother used to tell, one by one, all that took place. "We went that way, the soldiers came from there. We hid behind a tree. They shot from there, we went away, there was a stream, and we sat upon its bank. We rested awhile, then all of us—this one, that one, the other—she would name names—we went and cooked some *helva* (a kind of pastry) in a cave." She said once a soldier came while a child was crying above a cave, and a woman closed the child's mouth so that the soldier would not hear and turn back. During '38, they forced people of all ages to stand in a row. They were going to kill them with machine guns when an order came which declared that people would be exiled instead. That's how they were saved. They became dispersed as each tried to take hold of his own children and to save their own lives. Tunceli was closed.'

Gülümser's grandmother was sent to the town of Sinop on the Black Sea: 'My grandmother had a crown of silver and a nose plug. Saying "Let the sea take them, rather than the state," she threw them into the Black Sea.'

Like many children who were orphaned in that period, Gülümser's father was adopted by a Turkish family and raised in Ankara. Some families chose to return to Tunceli in the late 1940s, when an amnesty was declared. Gülümser's maternal aunt died in Sinop soon after marrying a Sunni man against the wishes of her family. Subsequently, Gülümser's mother, who was studying to be a school teacher, was removed from school by Gülümser's grandmother and forced to return to Tunceli and to marry there: 'They couldn't tell the people in the places they went about themselves. My grandmother liked her neighbours, but didn't think they could be good friends or that they could be close. To like one another is one thing, to trust, another. In the end, they all went back. They built new homes, and resumed the old way of life.'

According to Gülümser, the identity of individuals from Tunceli is constructed in large part on the basis of the memory of that first experience of exile: 'When our people went to the city, seeing that the women there were covered, they felt the need to cover themselves. Because they were afraid of being treated badly, they restricted their own daughters. What seems normal to you may seem abnormal outside. My grandmother can take someone else's arm, embrace him saying, "My Dear!" But taking someone's arm casually is not acceptable Turkish behaviour. Even ways of relating to other people became restricted in this way.'

The experience of 1938 had a two-fold outcome. On the one hand, it reinforced regional solidarity. On the other hand, it made the people of Dersim more aware of the world outside and of the need to adapt in order for the next generation to find a place in Turkish society. The experience of 1938 led Gülümser's parents' generation to insist on educating their children, which included teaching them Turkish:

'Because our people had experienced the difficulties of not knowing Turkish, they sent their children to school. They wanted to make sure their eyes were not closed to the outside world. Even at the risk of being separated from their children at a young age, they wanted them to know the world. "Let them become educated, get to know both worlds, make their own choices," they said. Our people want to have ties in both places. Maybe this is because they felt stuck in the middle in 1938. For they had suffered dearly because of this themselves.'

It is only later that parents would become disillusioned with national education, when youth from Dersim turned to leftist politics in large numbers:

'In those days young people who were in school could do whatever they liked in the village. Their families trusted and respected them. They felt that young people knew better because they went to school. Later when incidents and arrests began to occur in schools, parents concluded that education was harmful to their children. First they gave them this education, but later they realised it would result in their death. Then they took it away from them. For example, my father removed my elder brother from school.'

GEOGRAPHY AND IDENTITY

In her narrative, Gülümser constructs an image of the mythic past, the 'traditional' village as it existed beyond time, in the ethnographic present. This image is based both on her childhood memories and on

her grandmother's account of the pre-1938 era. This is how Gülümser describes Aşkirik: 'Valleys, mountains, forests...In summer, the grass is taller than the height of a person. You can't see the village for the walnut trees. There are springs, and spring water like ice. Above the village, snow remains in the mountaintops throughout the seasons.'

She refers to a genealogical document kept by the religious elders of Aşkirik, all of whose inhabitants are said to descend from an ancestor known as 'Boli' hailing from Iran. The inhabitants of the village are known as 'Bolyo', or the descendants of Boli. This is how Gülümser imagines 'traditional' village life before the catastrophe of 1938, when 'history' intervenes:

'Their life was easy. They earned their own bread. No one saw the face of the city. Maybe the state was even unaware of them. There were some fights between *aşiret* [kin groups], that's true. But no one interfered, everyone was free. One married whomever one desired. Rituals that took place during particular times of the year bound them. They were free to dress as they liked, and did not have to cover their hair.'

Ironically, this description is not very different from images based on her own experiences in the village as recently as the 1970s:

'We went to [graze] the lambs. That life was so much fun. You are free, first of all. I used to go willingly to the lambs because all my friends did the same. In the old days there were summer camps in the mountain pastures. In the evenings we would all gather together in a tent, singing songs and playing games. The doors of our houses were never locked. They said, "It's a sin to close your door. God's visitor should not be sent away."'

For Gülümser, who cannot return, the village has become frozen in time, an image to sustain her in the city. This follows also from her view of the village as a sacred space. Because of the historical experience of exile and return, there is an important relationship between geography and identity in Tunceli, enhanced by the importance of place in the syncretic cosmology of the Alevi of Dersim, for whom souls transmigrate and water, fire, mountains and the moon are personified and sanctified. As part of the community, the person/body 'belongs' to the places which protect it, including water sources, mountains, and the souls of the dead who continue to visit their homes after death. In this cosmology, there is no distinction between this life and the next, matter and spirit; the geography encompasses and stands for all.³⁰ The folklore of the region includes stories of

³⁰ For a depiction of a similar cosmology in a different geography see Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill, 'Dinnsheanchas: The Naming of High or Holy Places' in Patricia

various heroic figures, such as Düzgün Baba, which are at the same time well-known landmarks such as mountains.³¹ Thus Gülümser's grandmother appealed to the moon in the form of a female, or to the souls of her dead relatives, to protect the living:

'My grandmother was a woman who believed in other beings. For example, she worshipped the moon. She rose in the morning and kissed the walls, praying "Mother Fatma". She called the moon "Mother Fatma". Every Thursday she would throw *helva* into the hearth, naming the names of her dead relatives. Every Thursday there would be the smell of *helva* in our house. According to her beliefs, the dead would visit their homes on Thursdays, and the smell would let them know that they were remembered. Although they were dead and gone, their spirits would protect our house, they were the unseen protectors of the house.'

Ziyaret, visiting, is a form of communing with both a familiar place and with the spirits embodied there. In this manner particular places, such as water sources or mountains are visited from time to time:

'In the mountains or pastures, people feel protected. Each person feels an attachment to those sacred places. The sacred springs are called *jar*. There is a large spring known as Abdel Musa. At certain times during the year, people dress in clean clothes and go visiting. They sacrifice animals, cook some food. They all gather at the spring in remembrance.'

Thus, geography is central to identity in Tunceli, which is doubly tragic given the inability of natives to live in or visit their land today.³²

These mythic images of the village are in stark contrast to the present-day reality of Tunceli, which has been denuded by the war. The houses have been destroyed due to an earthquake and the war. The few remaining inhabitants, mostly the elderly, are no longer allowed to go to the mountain pastures. They are forced to place their foodstocks in the local military station. The village school is closed. Gülümser emphasizes the fact that the recent migration is largely involuntary and that the villagers feel caught between the military and the PKK:

'Our people are uninvolved. It's as if two people are fighting one another, but it's not clear what they are fighting for. Our people want both of them to

Yaeger, ed., *The Geography of Identity*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996.

³¹ Ali Kemali, *Erzincan*, Istanbul: Kaynak Yayinlari, 1932, 1992.

³² This brief discussion of belief systems in a Dersim is not meant to imply that such beliefs are unique to this region. Ahmet Yaşar Ocak's historical study *Osmanli*

leave them alone. They may also be afraid of another massacre. There is little they can do except migrate. But they live in the city. They cannot sit cooped up in the house. They must walk, run, and move about. They cannot fill the void. In the village, they are their own bosses. It is difficult for them to work for someone else for little pay. Their spirits cannot abide it. They drink, smoke cigarettes, and go to the coffee houses.'

It is significant that the only negative image in Gülümser's memories of the village concerns her account of the time when soldiers came to the village after the 1980 military coup to confiscate arms: 'I didn't really see any soldiers until I finished school. They gave me a cold feeling. I didn't even like seeing my brother in army clothes. One day we were out with the lambs. The place where the lambs used to graze was above the road that went to the village. While sitting up there, we saw the black vehicles arrive. They searched all the homes. They made us all stand in line in front of the school. They had a wireless in their hand. They showed it to us, asking whether anyone had seen it. I had never seen a wireless before. But even if we had, we wouldn't have said anything. I am sure of that. We went home to find that our fathers were not there. They had beaten them up in the coffee house. Nothing was found. But there was this. We had music in the Zaza language and when the people saw the military vehicles, they hid the cassettes in the ground.'

HYBRID SUBJECTIVITY

At the age of eleven, Gülümser was sent to Izmir to attend high school. Gülümser's account of her experiences in Izmir is constructed vis-à-vis two distinct histories of migration. On the one hand, the original forced migration, or exile, of 1938, and on the other, the tendency among families in Tunceli beginning in the 1950s, of sending their children outside the region for schooling, a practice that was an outcome of the experience of 1938.

Gülümser recounts that as a child, she longed to see the city, and to return to the village triumphant, an educated youth, just like her elder siblings before her: 'During that period, I dreamt that I would finish high school and go back to the village. Like my elder brother and his friends, I too would visit all the homes. The people in the village would do as I said. I would have a wonderful world in the village.'

Toplumunda Zindiklar ve Mülhidler, Istanbul: Tarih Vakfi Yurt Yayinlari, 1998, ably demonstrates the syncretic nature of religious belief in Anatolia.

However, her experience of migration is one of disappointment and disillusionment:

‘I was very curious about what might be outside the village. When I went, I was disappointed. I was looking for the places I read about in storybooks. I thought the place I went to would be green as the village, with tall grass. I didn’t realise that apartment buildings would be so ugly. I didn’t like Izmir. I felt like something had been taken away from me.’

Separated from her parents, having to live with her sister-in-law who saw her as a burden, Gülümser’s need to remain loyal to her family resulted in a retreat into herself, a move enhanced by the realisation of cultural difference (and disparagement) in the city. Although a good student, by her late teens Gülümser gave up her school work, going through a period of personal crisis, which coincided with a crisis of adolescence:

‘As a child, I saw my family as perfect. My father was a god, my mother a goddess. People talked about God, but it was them that I saw in front of me. I couldn’t find the ease of my child self in Izmir. I lived apart from my family for years, became cut off from them. I behaved like a guest when I went back to the village, because I had to act that way in Izmir.’

Gülümser’s adolescent crisis was confounded by the difficulties she experienced in school as a bilingual person: ‘I learned first Kurdish, and then Turkish. We spoke both languages at home. Sometimes the two languages would get so mixed up that I experienced difficulty at school. I would realise that a word I had spoken was not Turkish when someone asked, “What do you mean?”’

She was admonished by her family to hide her identity in public. Despite her curiosity about the lives of her friends from Sunni backgrounds, she tended to keep close to home during her years in high school:

‘In class once a fellow student said, “They are Kizilbaş [A derogatory term for the Alevi].” This made me feel that my family was right. “Don’t tell anyone, they will ostracise you, there is no need for them to know,” they said. I was different in Izmir. I didn’t visit the homes of my Sunni friends. I was curious, but also afraid that I would be hurt.’

This personal crisis led Gülümser to abandon her school work, so that even though she was a good student, she was unsuccessful in the university entrance examinations: ‘In my last year in school I gave up on everything. I knew I would not make it in the university entrance exams. What I did all day was to play ball in front of the door. I would take the ball, hit the wall, “tap, tap!”’

After graduating from high school, Gülümser began to rebel against her family: much of this rebellion centred on an opposition she constructed between the freedom of her child self in the village and her restricted life as a young woman in the city. According to Gülümser, the fear of disparagement which led Alevi families to hide their identity in public, along with pressures towards inmarriage, led families to repress their daughters in the city, which was not the case in the village. Just as in the case of Kemalism and Islamism, for the Alevi community as well, women embody the community, thus bearing the brunt of the identity problem in the city.³³ For Gülümser, family, which represented solidarity in the village, became identified with repression in the city:

‘In the village, I would be very much at ease. When I came here, I was restricted. When my sister would leave the village, my grandmother would say, “You might wear a headscarf, the people you encounter might think badly of you.” I liked the life in the village. I don’t like the families in the city. I felt those ties to be restricting in the city. I lived a carefree childhood without restraints. After a certain age you experience restrictions. I think this is related to the fears people experienced in 1938.’

This is why, while acknowledging her cultural roots, rather than retreating into her community in the city, she chose to strike out on her own upon moving to Istanbul, building her own personal network. The cost, however, of her choices was high: loneliness, anxiety about the future and the reality of being a single dependent young woman at the age of twenty-nine. Gülümser expresses her feelings in a series of digitised drawings.

SEVENTY-TWO NATIONS

In 1988, at the age of eighteen, Gülümser decided to migrate for the second time, this time to the city of Istanbul. This move marked the beginning of a changed relationship to her family, and the search for a new way of becoming the ‘carefree goatherd’ in the city. Leaving Izmir, Gülümser negotiated a new relationship with her community, as well as initiating a new, personal strategy for dealing with others: ‘You feel restrained, stuck between two worlds. “I’m going to Istanbul” I said. “You can’t go alone Gülümser,” my brother replied. I began to ask, “Do I always have to sit by your knee? Where is my own life?”’

³³ Göle, ‘Gendered Nature of the Public Sphere’.

Gülümser came to Istanbul, where she stayed with her sister and worked at a series of secretarial jobs. She also began to venture forth to build her own network:

‘I am a rebel inside. The problem was for me to find myself, to find out what it was I wanted. My goal was to get to know the lives of Sunni families. I achieved this goal, visited the homes of my girlfriends, and they visited me. I tried to create a dialogue.’

Part of her search for her own sense of self included coming to terms with being Alevi both in the sense of acknowledging her background in public and in not feeling restricted by this identity:

‘Once when I told someone I was Alevi, he asked me what “putting out the candle” meant (this term is used by Sunnis to imply that men and women engage in licentious sexual behaviour in Alevi communities). Until then, I did not know what this meant. After that I thought that people should stop viewing each other with blinders, that it was necessary to discuss these matters, to get to know one another. When I was introduced to someone, I began to say, “I am Alevi. If speaking to an Alevi is a problem for you, goodbye!” My family don’t want me to marry an outsider. They are afraid their daughters might be ostracised if they marry outside the community. I once dated a Sunni man. And I told my family right away. I was hoping to break this taboo, or rather to force my family to break it.’

After reading the transcription of her life history narrative, Gülümser composed, on her own initiative, an autobiographical essay entitled ‘The Current Situation.’ In this piece, she reflects on having told her life story:

I can define myself better now as a result of what I have told of myself in the last years. I have a growing interest in the different cultures living in Turkey. The time when I felt fragmented seems behind me now. I am looking at the world from outer space. I think of the Native Americans or of the people who lived in the British colonies. The word ‘Sunni’ means little to me now. I think only of human beings. I don’t think of marriage in terms of ‘Alevi’ or ‘Sunni.’ If I get along, if I am attracted, why not? But I would still insist, ‘Look, I am an Alevi.’ I don’t fast during Ramzan, but I feel the spirituality of that period through my friends. It is important to feel that colour.

Gülümser’s reflections on the Turkish modernity project raise the issue of the necessity of a new social contract at the wake of the new millennium based on an acknowledgement of our hybrid cultural heritage:

‘When the Republic was first established, many rules were written into the constitution. Some communities were not even aware of these laws.

The current reaction is partly due to the fact that people were forced to change many things about their lives. If this were left to time, if a false history which claimed that all shared the same identity was not created, there wouldn't be this reaction. There are seventy-two nations in this country. No one can deny this. If the State does not want people to rebel, it must fulfil their expectations.'

The attempt to collapse national time, collective time and personal time in the construction of a national identity, and the insistence of the Turkish modernity project on a break with the lived past (as required by the identification with an invented distant past), in the context of the current reassessment of Kemalism and of the bases of belonging in Turkey four generations removed from 1923, has resulted in a contemporary preoccupation with the past in the present and for the present. Life history narratives are one means of exploring how ordinary persons in Turkey construct a sense of self vis a vis national time, space, and narrative since the establishment of the Turkish Republic. As the narrative of Gülümser Kalik analysed here exemplifies, the contemporary young generation has negotiated identity in Turkey through a personal and political search for a sense of self and belonging in ways that are distinctly different from those of previous generations.