

Much of the anthropological discourse on modernity has recognized the future orientation of modernity and the accompanying continuous appropriation of novelty. The experience of modernity is as much an experience of the ideology of modernization, an ideology that valorizes the new, as it is a phenomenological sensing of the changing world about oneself. It could be argued that great ruptures rarely take place and in fact continuity with previous periods may be teased out by discourse analysis and ethnographic inquiry (Foucault, Ivy; Meeker, Berdahl). Despite this, the experience of modernity has again and again been couched in the terms of disjunction from that which is perceived as a lost past.

The seeming inconsistency between the continuity that may be discerned and the experience of alienation from a previous period felt and expressed by so many may be understood in light of the construction of memory. Forming and reshaping one's memories involves much more than a simple retelling of one's own personal story, it involves the semiotic processes of highlighting and an iconization of certain practices as modern, whereby an erasure occurs, denying the existence of that which comes to be experienced as lost. Through the conscious highlighting of particular patterns of behavior, ways of speech, and modes of understanding the world, these aspects of experience come to be iconized as the modern. Ideological iconization of this sort always is accompanied by an erasure of that which is not iconized. Those practices that are not seen as modern are erased; they are forgotten—often willfully—as are those who engage in such practices. Pierre Bourdieu has analyzed the role of iconization and erasure in the creation a hegemonic French language ideology and understands the erasure of those who engage in such practices as the symbolic or epistemic violence done to them by those in

positions of dominance. Written out of history or often reinterpreted as an impediment to progress, primitive people and their antiquated ways come to be distanced from the modern, just as speakers of *patois* were seen as a barrier to the unification of the French language and distanced from it, often by their own complicity. Those practices rejected by the ideology of modernization come to be constructed as the way things once were, as a way of opposing the way things should be now, and ultimately serve as a trope to define that which has been left behind. This semiotic erasure may be understood as a type of repression.

Yet the repressed is never fully resolved, any more than the ideological erasure of practices is capable of fully eradicating them. There will always be a return of the repressed, a resurfacing of the erased. That which is constructed by the ideology of modernity as the vanquished past out of which the future-oriented present has emerged comes to be experienced as a loss, a loss that may be longed for, in a nostalgic desire for that which is within sight, yet beyond reach. In this return of the repressed, the very habits and people who were erased are recreated as objects of desire. The paradox is that this fetishization, as Marilyn Ivy calls this process, necessitates and presupposes the distancing of the lost object of desire. Even as those who have been erased by modernization and then longed for in modernity's nostalgic mode are restored, they are restored according the logic of modernity, a logic that assigns such practices a subordinated and devalued position. However, in order to maintain a sense of triumph and the tenuous congratulatory certainty of modernity, these objects of desire can be neither eradicated nor fulfilled; they must be maintained at a distance, removed from the

modern as what Ivy calls the uncanny, the longed for objects of a past constructed by a future-oriented modernity.

It is these processes of modern memory making that will be explored in the remainder of this paper. Michael Meeker demonstrates the processes by which the Turkish state came to deny and willfully forget its continuity with an Ottoman Imperial past in constructing an ideology of the modern; Marilyn Ivy analyzes the discourses of modernist nostalgia in Japan, as mediated through the popular culture and its fetishization of the uncanny; and Daphne Berdahl provides an ethnographic account of the reshaping of memories through practices of consumerism, as well as the nostalgic longing for a past that never existed, created by means of a commodification itself indicative of modernity.

In Michael Meeker's account of the practices of local elites in the Trabzon region of Turkey's Black Sea coast, he argues that instead of seeing such practices as constituting a failure of the centralized power of the state to extend its controlling grasp to this marginal littoral, these practices reflect a full integration of the region into Imperial politics. The system of aghas "had arisen as district social formations in the course of local participation in the imperial system" (Meeker, 30). This connection with the Imperial system was, however, denied by the aghas themselves who understood their practices to be traditional and to have always been in place. Contrary to this, however, Meeker argues that these local elites "turned away from parochial customs and habits and turned toward the universal norms of the imperial system" (Meeker, 39). As a result of this integration into the Imperial system and their embracing of Islam, Oflu elites "tended, then, as both individuals and communities, to see themselves as participants in universal projects of power and truth" (Meeker, 97). There was clear evidence that the aghas and

their mansions, the hodjas and their students, and the contemporary practices of local government were a legacy of the Imperial rule of the Ottoman state.

Despite this connection with state-level politics and the sense that in Trabzon “local and global factors combined to reinforce a preoccupation with... ‘the horizon of elsewheres’” (Meeker, 98), both Oflus and the Turkish state willfully forgot the connection of what was conceived as a marginal region to the Imperial project, and demonstrated a constructed amnesia for the Imperial origins of their local leaders. The aghas and their power were initially derived not solely from their local positioning, but rather from their social positioning vis-à-vis the Imperial government. Given titles and charged with protecting trade routes between the inland passages and coastal valleys, the aghas and their families rose to power in the local context because of their affiliation with the state. Yet, in the modern Turkish period the descendents of these very same aghas empowered and installed by the state government, had no memory of this origin of power and were denied by the state, although they remained and occupied the majority of local government posts.

As Meeker continued to explore the relationship of these aghas and the hodjas in relation to the Turkish state, he became “obliged to consider memories and traditions as desire rather than fact” (Meeker, 33). Through the process of iconization of the past, selectively forgetting that which would be perceived as lost, the Oflus were not only expressing historical events, but primarily were expressing a longing for how the present ought to be shaped. This repression represents aspects of the historical record deemed inappropriate due to the dominant ideology of governance imported from the West, wherein local oligarchies were perceived as having no legitimate role in the governing of

a centralized state. In this ideology, it was difficult for both Western observers and old republicans who had adopted the ideology to understand how “in the absence of technological modernity, a collection of peoples living in a rural landscape more or less without towns had become a state-oriented society” (Meeker, 108). Meeker spends a great deal of time exploring the mechanism of governmentality, namely that of interpersonal association, that was recursively applied from the highest levels of Imperial authority down the local coffeehouses. However interesting it is that “the Muslims of Trabzon were the creatures of imperial undertakings and accomplishments, not a marginal people at the fringe of the Ottoman Empire” (Meeker, 228), what is of interest in this study of the politics of modern memory is that the indebtedness of the local oligarchs and their patterns of behavior to the Imperial system was erased.

In turning to the historical record, Meeker discerns that this selective forgetting, the purging of certain unacceptable elements from the narrative of history, has a precedent in Of. The local historian Umur, having accepted the dominant ideology of governmentality “associates the aghas and agha-families with conditions of civil disorder that he attributed to the decline of the classical imperial system. He thereby disconnects them from the later Empire just as he disconnects them from the early Republic” (Meeker, 301-302). Through his history Umur writes the aghas, who along with the hodjas, were both created out of the *ancien régime* and gave rise to the new Republic, out of the official records of the formation of the Turkish state. Those who played an important role, yet were unacceptable to the new Kemalist government were erased. Thus Umur “not only consciously chose to remain silent about the aghas, but he also forgot about them precisely by way of a thought that was forbidden to him” (Meeker, 302-303). The

ideology within which and for which Umur was writing could not actually prohibit the aghas from having any political role in the formation of the new Turkish nation, yet this was their vision of how the future ought to look, just as the hodjas were to be proscribed from having any influence in the intellectual trajectory of the new state, despite their continued existence and influence. The memories recorded of the aghas playing no role in the Battle for Of and the formation of the new Turkish Republic did indeed express more of an ideological and imagined goal rather than an actual state of affairs.

Yet, despite the erasure of the aghas and hodjas from the sanctioned historical record—the official means by which collective memories are legitimated and propagated, removing from memory that which is objectionable to the dominant ideology—both classes of persons continued to exist. Just as that which is repressed is bound to return, so too were the aghas and hodjas bound to reappear, which they did in the midst of and as an impetus for Meeker’s fieldwork in Of. Even as they were written out of the official history, having been forgotten by the Turkish nation just as they were complicit in the amnesia of their own origin as a local oligarchy in interactions with the Imperial state, the aghas returned by virtue of their “ability to reposition themselves with changes in the state system [that] had always been a feature of their very existence as a local elite” (Meeker, 80). Through this recognition of the lasting presence of the local elites, constituted by their continued strategic deployment of their role as facilitators of interpersonal associations, Meeker argues that in the modern urban setting, a situation in which the power of the aghas might be expected to be most diminished, one observed that a “new awareness of aghas and agha-families was actually a harbinger of a new degree of institutional rationalization that was accompanying economic differentiation and

expansion” (Meeker, 386). Meeker pointed to the paradox of the aghas whose role in the development of the modern Turkish state had been erased, just as was their existence as a legacy of the particular strategy of government of the old Republic of the Ottoman Empire. Denied a place in the memories of the Oflu, both official and popular, the successes of the aghas as mediators of interpersonal association in urban areas are “indications of the transformative and inventive potential of the old imperial devices in the environment of modernity” (Meeker, 395).

Just as a craftsman in the nineteenth century “feels himself to represent the future, one based on an ethical rather than an instrumental relationship to self and other” (Meeker, 237), so to do the aghas feel themselves to represent the future, despite their historical anchoring. In their ever changing world they deploy the Ottoman technique of interpersonal association to make sense out of and to advance their positions in the world. Having willingly forgot their origin in the Imperial system when such relationships were denied by the new political ideology, and the subsequent forgetting of their role in bringing about the modern nation, the actual continuity of these local elites is nevertheless not diminished. Despite the continuity with earlier modes of interaction and with the power relations of the Ottoman Empire, the memories—both collective and individual, both official and subalternate—are constructed in such a way as to deny the reliance on what came before. Both the Turkish state and the aghas are agents of modernization, repressing their continuity and reliance on that which came before, distancing themselves from the past, in order to generate a sense of the novel, a sense of the truly modern, in opposition to the backwards otherness constructed of an era willingly left behind.

In many ways Marilyn Ivy's analysis of the role of memory in Japanese modernity extends Meeker's study of amnesia in the making of the modern Turkish nation. Ivy explores the actual mechanism of the construction of memories through a Lacanian analysis, looking not at that which is repressed and forgotten in modernity, as exemplified in the above précis of Meeker's fieldwork, but rather how the repressed returns in the form of the fetishized commodity, the uncanny of modernist nostalgia. In creating a sense of the modern, the novel, that which preceded the modern, must be removed and placed at a distance from the experience of the immediate present. However that which is repressed or erased, in semiotic terms, must return and it does so in the constructed guise of a commodity, the uncanny that is strangely familiar yet somehow dangerous. It is through this process that modernity both removes and maintains that which the ideology of modernism claims to have surpassed: the past left behind. "Modernist nostalgia must preserve, in many senses, the sense of absence that motivates its desires" (Ivy, 10). The desire of the fetish must never be fulfilled, for to do so would be a failure of modernity, yet the fetish must be maintained as an object of desire, an other, for the construction of modernity to persist.

In specifically analyzing those "elements of a revived past [that] operate as the amplified elements of the stylishly novel" (Ivy, 57), Ivy provides discourse analysis of several aspects of Japanese life, including the creation of the native as something exotic and needing to be (re)discovered through tourism and the creation of "Tonotopia," an idealized vision of Japan drawn from nativist ethnology, as well as even more marginalized practices such as those of blind soothsayers at Mount Osore and itinerant *taishu engeki* theater performances. In all of these examples, Ivy sees evidence that a

“desperate attempt to appropriate a missing past is now refracted through the iron law of fashion change and the idea of the ‘generation’” (Ivy, 57). In other words, all of these practices, marginalized or not, represent the attempt on the part of the Japanese to discover and recover the authentically Japanese, by turning to the repressed and forgotten aspects of modern Japan.

Paradoxically, however, this “longing for pre-modernity, a time before the West, before the catastrophic imprint of westernization...is inescapably a *modern* endeavor, essentially unfolded within the historical condition that it would seek to escape” (Ivy, 241). In seeking to uncover the very aspects of Japanese life that are erased by the hegemonic discourses of modernity, they invoke such discourses and in so doing reinforce their hegemony. While inverting the values ascribed to the dichotomous relationship between the modern and pre-modern, the dichotomy and mutual exclusivity of the two are maintained, the modern practices are still iconized in the same way, but now that which was previously devalued is now desired in a nostalgic longing for a past that is receding across the horizon, vanishing into the haze of the pre-modern.

The result of this is a double bind: that which is erased must be maintained, yet held at bay and distanced. Yet the very distance of the pre-modern from the modern, within sight but seemingly out of reach, leads to the desire to recover that which is lost, that which has been intentionally left behind for the sake of modernity. By so doing the objects of desire come to be doubly inscribed, “as both superfluous and essential, marginal and traditional” in order for the loss to be recoverable (Ivy, 25). Objects, ways of being in the world, and practices that were once integral to the lives of some Japanese have previously been erased as that which is pre-modern and a hindrance towards

progress, are now sought after, however, they are further devalued in this new desire. Such practices are sought after as superfluous and marginal; in order to be held up as the traditional, they must be held in opposition to the modern and everything rational that is associated with modernity. Such marginalized practices come to exist “as ghostly reminders, as potentially scandalous presences that, by all rights, should not be there—yet which *must* be there, vanishing, to act as constitutive reminders of modernity’s losses” (Ivy, 243, emphasis original)

The experience of these practices held in this double bind gives rise to the uncanny. The uncanny is that which is both familiar and frightening, something which although known is ideologically erased and ought to have remained so (Ivy, 105-106). That which is hailed as traditional is uncanny, it is at the same time powerful and frightening, while also being strangely familiar and dreadfully cozy.<sup>1</sup> Thus while there is a longing for the uncanny, there is a desire to distance oneself from it, to remain at a remove from that which is frightening. This desire to control the uncontrollable, by keeping it away from oneself, compartmentalized in special domains characterizes modernity and is exemplified in ritual sacrifices that are no longer carried out as sacrifices, but as sanitized parades. These, as well as the practices of visiting exotic Japan but being always able to return to one’s home, “exemplify the modern desire to keep the uncanny at bay—to evoke the real without allowing its irruption into everyday life” (Ivy, 140). Thus tradition is embraced, but always with the reserve and distance of one who approaches tradition

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<sup>1</sup> Although “cozy” is not a term generally used in papers of an academic nature, it the preferred rendering of the Danish *hyggelig*, which is understood by many as a sort of overbearing coziness.

from the position of modernity, a position wherein tradition is both marginalized and turned to as a source of authenticity.

This separation of one's source of authenticity from that which is real leads to an anxiety of authenticity, an anxiety at the core of the experience of modernist nostalgia. Such constructed authenticity reflects "the duplicity of 'tradition' itself: a transmission that always contains the possibility of betrayal, of an arbitrary selection from the past" (Ivy, 187). Just as the past has come to be constructed according to ideological constraints in Of, so too are Japanese individuals constructed according to the dominant modernist ideology where every person is at once seeking to discover and recover that which modernity by its very nature has distanced from proximate experience. It is for this reason that Ivy can assert that "only from the position of loss can one assert that nothing has been lost; only when the seamless, unquestioned transmission of custom has been interrupted, does 'tradition' emerge. The realization of loss is forestalled, denied, by an insistence that nothing is lost. It is denied by an idealization, a memorialization of place, a bracketing of practices, an assertion of continuity" (Ivy, 188-190). By means of this modernist nostalgia, the fetishization of lost ways of being in the world that are always maintained as barely beyond grasp "sustains vanishing (but not yet vanished) forms of modernity" (Ivy, 237).

Daphne Berdahl provides an excellent ethnographic account of the sustaining of vanishing forms of modernity through an attempt on the part of the villagers of Kella to recapture in the *mode nostalgique* the past world of the German Democratic Republic. She analyzes how the process of reimagining East German identity is "part of a discourse of nostalgia and mourning—a 'hazy beautification of the past'—that has contested a

general devaluation of the East German past by dominant West German legal and discursive practices” (Berdahl, 175). Combining an analysis similar to (and referencing back to) that of Ivy, Berdahl also looks closely at the unequal power relations that make the negotiation of identity through memory formation on the border a seemingly overdetermined situation. Despite the consistent degradation of the East German past—which has come to be iconized as all that is inefficient, unproductive and of inferior quality, in short imagining what the united Germany is to be the opposite of—East Germans are resisting the erasure of aspects of their past through the nostalgic reappropriation of an *Ossi* identity. As seen in earlier cases, such as the return to the native exotic in Ivy’s analysis of Japan, the East German nostalgic reclamation paradoxically accepts the terms of the dichotomy, but reverses the value placed on what are ideologically constructed as “natural” characteristics of East Germans. In so doing, the nostalgia may be seen as a site of active resistance to hegemonic discourses of West German modernity, as Berdahl highlights, however, this process represents as much an acquiescence to the dominant discourse of imagining modernity and a resistance only on the terms granted the East Germans by the political and economically dominant West.

Turning to the process of imagining the past, Berdahl, however, argues that the resistance is active, as East Germans highlight and iconize the history of the German Democratic Republic and their life under the rule of the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* in qualitatively different ways than those in West Germany reimagine the same past. Common to both, however, is the imagining of an East Germany that does not reference the reality of past experience, but rather imagines history through the dominant trope of consumerism; East Germans come to define their *Ossi* identity through the

appropriation of nostalgic commodities, objects of desire that are “stripped from their original historical context of an economy of scarcity or an oppressive regime...recall[ing] an East Germany that never existed” (Berdahl, 176). This consumer aspect of memory reflects both a rejection of the West German ideals of what to consume in order to demonstrate one’s existence as a “good German,” however, by accepting the everyday items of the previous regime under which they lived—reimagined through a rejection of its iconization by the dominant ideology of the West—as *commodities* East Germans are implicitly accepting the terms of West German domination, a domination based on consumer capitalism. Berdahl sees this as evidence of “the way in which memory shapes, and is being shaped by, the consumption and reappropriation of things” (Berdahl, 176). Thus consumerism has redefined the way in which East Germans can construct their memories, if not the actual content of their memories. It seems that despite Berdahl’s optimistic tone and valorization of East German resistance to the dominant Western modes of thought, they have in reality surrendered their real difference in the very act of trying to resist West Germany *on West Germany’s terms*.

Berdahl traces this movement from an East German ideology, in which interpersonal connections were paramount and where Western goods were valorized because of the associations they evidenced, such as villager’s eager anticipation of *Westpakete* from relatives, to a West German ideology, where consumerism was the dominant trope for expressing one’s identity. This ideological movement, a movement that resulted in the creation of a cultural border where only a material border had existed before, resulted in “the loss of an illusion of the ‘Golden West.’ And the loss of this illusion has been one of the most formative and disorienting aspects of re-unification” (Berdahl, 177). That which

East Germans had longed for had proven inauthentic, had proven to reject the East Germans, and thus they engaged in a process of reimagining life in East Germany.

Turning to an explicit discussion of memory, Berdahl argues that “memory is an interactive, malleable, and highly contested phenomenon” (Berdahl, 207). She has provided evidence of this on the national level, as former East and West Germans contest the nature of the history of East Germany. However, she notes that within Kella the understanding of “the way things were” is also negotiated. As demonstrated by a conversation between Thomas Spiegel and his mother, Berdahl notes “how quickly the past may be remade into and shaped by memory” (Berdahl, 213). Thomas is acutely observing that the discourse appropriated by many East Germans after *die Wende* that the East Germans were all victims of a repressive regime is the symbolic and epistemic violence done them by the new repressive regime, that of West Germany. In espousing a discourse of former repression, East Germans are making a statement about the desire to be part of West Germany, but at the same time they are erasing manifold aspects of their own lives, in much the same way that Meeker’s aghas were forgetting their origins.

In the guise of younger people like Thomas, who had lived his whole life in East Germany, “discourses of victimization have given way to, and continue to oscillate between, discourses of nostalgia and mourning—demonstrating the shifting, multiple, and infinitely malleable nature of memory” (Berdahl, 218). Memory is contested and the differences between generations comes to be created through the differences in ideological remembering of the past. East Germans such as Thomas who contest the acceptance of the dominant ideology of repression expressed by his mother are aware that “such representations of the past were affirmations of the present” (Berdahl, 209). Just as

Frau Spiegel remembered her life in East Germany as a way to make a statement about the present, so too did Thomas, however, the latter's memory was colored by a loss of the illusion of the Golden West.

The erasure of life in former East Germany results not only in the subjugation of ideologies of East Germany, but an erasure of the actual people who are also iconized in the negative image formation by the West of the Eastern Other. The workers who labored in East Germany, the local SED partisans, and others are all forced by virtue of the new ideology to disappear in the reunited Germany (Berdahl, 211). They are erased and forty years of their lives are made to seem useless, as though they were capable of accomplishing nothing until the West intervened. Berdahl's ethnographic data calls those in the West to recognize that there is more than one story of Kella; Kella has many residents, some who worked directly for the former East German government, others who left the West to care for elderly parents, but that all of them, in some sense were responsible for the continuing operation of the East German government. There was little willful resistance to the SED in this village within the *Grenze*, so the vilification of a few as agents of former repression does not capture the fullness of life in Kella. The introduction of a dominant Western ideology, an ideology that was supposed to liberate the inhabitants of Kella and the whole of the GDR, has resulted in a dehumanization for many, a dehumanization that takes place through the semiotic processes of iconization and erasure. By forgetting they are also dominating and imagining a future.

Berdahl notes that "nostalgic discourses of the past may also entail a novel form of willful forgetting, or silence: the choice *not* to know" (Berdahl, 219). This type of amnesia, I would argue, is ubiquitous among discourses of modernization. In the future

orientation of modernity, the past must always be overcome. In order to construct a memory of the past that will serve the future, a willful amnesia or even a delusion must be constructed in order to imagine a distance, a chasm perceived to be unbridgeable yet transparent, created by a rupture. This rupture, however, is itself a product of memory, a construction to serve the needs of the present ideology of progress toward the future. This ideology is sustained by the “assumption that the past is something that must and can be overcome in order to ‘construct an alternative agenda for the future’” (Berdahl, 215).

The contradiction between an experience of continuity and an experience of alienation from a previous period involves the semiotic processes of highlighting and an iconization of certain practices as modern, whereby an erasure occurs, denying the existence of that which is experienced as lost. Those practices that are not seen as modern are erased; they are forgotten—often willfully—as are those who engage in such practices. That which is written out of history, constructed as the vanquished past out of which the future-oriented present has emerged, by the ideology of modernity because it does not serve the needs of the dominant classes, comes to be experienced as a loss, a loss that may be longed for, in a nostalgic desire for that which is beyond reach. Paradoxically this return necessitates and presupposes the distancing and devaluation of the lost object of desire according to the hegemonic discourses of modernity. This semiotic process of erasure and the psychoanalytic process of repression both involve a reimagining of memories, memories that are not exclusively at a personal level, but that are constrained and in some senses given by the dominant political narratives, as has been shown with the local elite in Turkey, the mass media in Japan, and the reunification of an East German village.