Performative Memory:
Judith Butler and Remembering
Turkey's 2016 Coup

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Abstract

In this article, I use the concepts of Judith Butler's theory of performativity, namely interpellation, subject constitution, repetition, sedimentation, citationality and subversion, to show how her theory could provide a procedural account of memory formation. First, I situate Butler within the larger scope of cultural memory studies, specifically those that deal with the performance of memory. This leads to a key question: What makes for a memorable life? To illustrate how this might work, I look at how Turkey has chosen to commemorate the failed coup of July 2016 by interpreting some examples of such cultural memory through Butler's theories. In doing so, I show that Butler offers a systematic framework that ties identity, memory and politics together, showing not only how it is kept up but also how it changes over time. More importantly, this leads us to question how memories are made and who is kept from cultural memories and the repercussions this has on their lives.

Keywords: Cultural Memory, Judith Butler, Memory Practices, Performativity, Politics, Turkey.

Introduction

While the field of cultural memory studies has branched out and risen to prominence in recent decades, critics repeatedly complain that cultural memory is, in the words of Alon Confino, "more practiced than theorized," leaving memory studies with a rather basic question: how does memory work? (2010: 79). It would be profoundly unfair to say cultural memory scholars have not been interested in theory, but their theoretical musings have tended to focus on solitary features of memory rather than any procedural schematic of how memory emerges and sustains itself. Writers frequently avoid speculative accounts and instead investigate limited components of memory formation or particular memories because it otherwise risks inflating correlations and oversimplifying memory, but this in-between of general theory and context-specific evaluations still has space to explore. At the same time, Pierre Nora's prolific concept of "*lieux de mémoire*," attesting that sites of memory (that could be monuments as well as historical figures) all have material, functional and symbolic dimensions, has recently come under attack for its rigidity, being nation-centric and framing memory as largely static (e.g., Rigney 2005, 2018, Winter 2010). Astrid Erll (2011) even proposes the term "travels of memory" to insinuate that memory exists via movement, processes and transcultural interpretation. Thus, along with a need to further explore memory's ambulation, there has been a continuous turn towards the factors in cultural memory's formation and continuation.

In this article, I use an interpretation of Judith Butler's theory of performativity as a way to address these quandaries of memory. While cultural memory has not shied away from engaging with postmodern thinkers, there has not been much serious engagement with Butler. This incorporation would allow one to better understand, on a symbolic level, how cultural memory comes about and why it functions as it does, which could greatly enrich the field and add new perspectives. This is not to argue that other approaches to memory are erroneous or inferior in the least, merely that different approaches have different aims. By taking up Butler and memory, researchers gain valuable perspectives on the practice of remembering the past. I begin this article by explaining the areas of cultural memory studies most pertinent to what Butler could offer. After this, I briefly outline her theoretical concepts and how they could be used to discuss memory. In the final section, I use this framework to illustrate some ways Turkey has memorialized the July 2016 failed military coup. While not unique in its memory tactics, Turkey represents a great illustrative example because (1) it has many ideological conflicts when it comes to memorialization, and (2) it shows how memory is a performative action grounded in political landscapes. More importantly, as is returned to in the conclusion, Butler's philosophy allows us to ask which lives are memorable, or which society sees as "worth" remembering.

Performative Memory Studies

Cultural memory studies in fact already has strong foundations for incorporating some of Butler's concepts, such as repetition or sedimentation. A survey of existing literature and concepts in the field of cultural memory studies illustrates this well. Within the first half of the twentieth century, both Maurice Halbwachs (1980) and the École des Annales (see Burguière 2006, Burke 2015, Le Goff 1992) were deeply interested in collective memory, particularly in how memory functioned as a "collective mentality" (Confino 1997: 1389). Later scholars took up this mantle in various guises, yet memory studies terminology problematically has a range in meaning and connotation (e.g., Eriksen 2014, Erll 2011, Erll and Nünning 2010, Kansteiner 2002, Rigney 2005, Wertsch 2004), with disparate versions of cultural memory proliferating. Writers like Benedict Anderson (1998), Eric Hobsbawm (2012), Charles Tilly (1992) and Ernest Gellner (1987, 2009) have employed a nation-centric approach – like Nora did – oftentimes to the chagrin of others (e.g., Erll 2011, Rigney 2018). Meanwhile, scholars like Anne Eriksen (2014), David Harvey (2001) and Laurajane Smith (2006) utilize memory in heritage studies to understand the connection between a group of people and their cultural heritage, whether that be in physical or nonphysical artifacts. More recently, cultural memory studies has been deployed to investigate transnational memory (e.g., De Cesari and Rigney 2014) as well as intergenerational memory (e.g., Danieli 1998). Furthermore, Jan Assmann (1995) and Aleida Assmann (2011) have famously put forward an understanding of cultural memory largely based in discourse and practices arising from historical construction. As I illustrate in the following section, each of these has a parallel in Butler's theories on performativity.

While these multifarious accounts retain some core differences, I believe one can draw on a number of common themes, most notably cultural memory as performative instead of definitive or predetermined. Jeanette Rodriguez and Ted Fortier, for example, argue that "one means by which memory is transmitted is through narrative. Narrative emphasizes the active, self-shaping quality of human thought" (2007: 7). Barbara Mills and William Walker famously refer to this performance of memory as "memory work," or "a process that is continually changed through the active engagement of people in remembering (and other forms of memory work)" (2008: 7–8). Building on this interpretation, Michael Rothberg argues "that memory is a contemporary phenomenon, something that, while concerned with the past, happens in the present; and second, that memory is a form of work, working through, labor, or action" (2009: 3–4). Likewise, James Wertsch (2004) has taken to call this process "mediated action," which though similar to "memory work" additionally stresses the importance of cultural context. Even within heritage studies, heritage is seen as emphatically performative: "Heritage was a process of engagement, an act of communication and an act of

making meaning in and for the present" (Smith 2006: 1). Thus, there is a tenacious tradition of memory as performative in that it is viewed as being acted out or part of a larger cultural activity. I believe that this side of cultural memory studies, interested in the "activity" of memory, allows Butler's theories to be blended into the existing literature.

Another area in memory studies that overlaps with Butler, or so I would argue, is the idea of a cultural environment in which we are permanently enmeshed. Michel Foucault (2012) referred to this as the "archive"; Pierre Bourdieu (2013) called it the "habitus." Both were major influences for Butler and cultural memory studies. More technical chronicles of the archive wish to break down exactly what it is and how it functions. Erll distinguishes between "collected" memory, which is the process of socialization, and "collective" memory, which is the archive of memories shared by a community (2011: 97). Similarly, Wertsch separates "episodic" memory from "instrumental" memory, explaining the prior as *know-that* whereas the latter is *know-how* (2004: 51–55). While numerous scholars have outlined their understanding of the archive (Assmann 1995, Eriksen 2014, Gellner 1987, Ramsay 2015, Rothberg 2009, Winter 2010), the most notable version comes from Aleida Assmann (2011). For her, the archive is not only a collection of cultural memories but also the politics of its organization, maintenance and control, all of which contribute to what is remembered and how. Butler built on the idea of social norms and how they come to be calcified as cultural rules. As such, individuals are situated in a field of relationships that both influence and react to the ways they think, act and speak. In this respect, culturual memory relies on an extensive web of relationships that refer to either memory practices or specific memory contexts (as I argue in the following section).

Finally, we come to memory's relation to identity. Cultural memory has traditionally been seen as a dynamic social activity for which different groups compete for limited memory resources. Many writers have embraced this "competitive" framework of identity and memory (e.g., Kansteiner 2002, Smith 2006), whereby the history of vying collective identities fight over the limited resources for telling their histories – or versions of histories. However, Rothberg's work on "multidirectional" memory has forced us to reevaluate how memories interact in the social arena; Rothberg argued that the public space is not "a pregiven, limited space" but "a malleable discursive space in which groups do not simply articulate established positions…both the subjects and spaces of the public are open to continual reconstruction" (2009: 5). He specifies that new social coalitions between differing cultural memories have the capacity to reform themselves and completely alter how a society remembers. Regardless, almost every person in this field has agreed that group identity is largely bound up with these memory processes, whether they see it as competitive or multidirectional. In

the next section, I detail how Butler's theories are able to situate themselves into this debate by seeing neither identity nor memory as established facets of existence but different nexuses of social norms, thus supporting Rothberg's multidirectional theory. Building on the idea that cultural memory is intertwined in webs of relationships, be they practices or content, Butler's notion of performativity (and its conceptual ramifications) maps out a way to interpret Rothberg's multidirectional memory. Rather than restricting one's scope to a limited area where memory can manifest itself, Butler's approach instead emphasizes the way in which cultural memory structures itself within a larger social framework and socio-political narratives. In essence, it allows one to look not only at *what* memory is being performed but also *how* it is being performed.

Memory as Performance: An Outline of Butlerian Performativity

Butler's performativity is a process where identity and social norms are tightly woven into one another, meaning those who practice memory and memories themselves have an irrevocable relationship, which many scholars have likewise attested. For instance, Jay Winter states, "Commemoration at sites of memory is an act arising out of a conviction, shared by a broad community, that the moment recalled is both significant and informed by a moral message" (2010: 62). Discussing national identity, Gellner argues that a nation must have social norms in addition to a "*willed* adherence" to them (2009: 53). Heritage scholars give profound focus to how our memories are intertwined with who we are, which Smith is keen to note: "The real sense of heritage…occurs in the way that we then use, reshape and recreate those memories and knowledge to help us make sense of and understand not only who we 'are,' but also who we want to be" (2006: 2). Memory is intrinsically linked with identity, and Butler's performativity presents a theory of identity formation beginning with a naming process called interpellation, or the moment a subject's identity is created. The subject gets called, or "hailed," into a social role, which works as an identifier and becomes its identity: "By being called a name, one is also, paradoxically given a certain possibility for social existence, initiated into a temporal life of language that exceeds the prior purposes that animate the call" (Butler 1997a: 2). Yet, one's interpellation into their identity is not always voluntary: "The terms by which we are hailed are rarely the ones we choose" (Butler, 1997a: 38); this can have very severe consequences like being hailed as Jewish under the Axis powers or a Roma in contemporary Europe.

This act of interpellation literally creates a subject's identity, including any baggage it comes with. Butler writes, "The call is formative, if not *per*formative,

precisely because it initiates the individual into the subjected status of the subject" (2011: 82). This act introduces the subject into a group sharing cultural memories, i.e., one is socialized into a certain culture based on their identity. A similar idea has been put forward by Jan Assmann as "*the concretion of identity*," whereby "the supply of knowledge in the cultural memory is characterized by sharp distinctions made between those who belong and those who do not" (1995: 130). One is forced to take on an identity that determines who one is and is not. Based on the theories of Louis Althusser (2014), Butler argues that when a subject is interpellated, they become involved in the socio-political relations that cultural memory allots. They consequently become constituted as a subject, and though this is a key memory process, the actual context in which it occurs varies significantly.

Interpellation is nevertheless not a one-time deal, requiring the repetition of socially accepted cultural "rituals": "The ritual dimension of convention implies that the moment of utterance is informed by the prior [commemoration] and, indeed, future moments [of commemoration] that are occluded by the moment itself" (Butler 1997a: 25). Some of the most prominent names in memory studies have been staunch defenders of repetition (Assmann 1995, Krapp 2004, Rigney 2005, Sielke 2013, Winter 2010), especially among those in the nation-centric camp. Yet, the question has consistently been *how* repetition plays into this process, and one Butlerian strategy would be to follow Wertsch's aforementioned distinction between "episodic" (*know-that*) and "instrumental" (*know-how*) memory. Repetition could be episodic in that it deals with the content of a memory, or it could be instrumental in that it deals with its medium. Acts of memory are in this way merely repetitions of previously set episodic and instrumental conventions giving substance to claims of remembrance: "Without that prior context, things would not give rise to affective tones as they do, but within that context, or on the presumption of such a context being in place, they surely do" (Butler 2012: 5). Without the repetition of previous events and the means for repeating them, memories erode.

Over time, repeated acts thus become normalized within a social context, whereby the subject or community believe such acts are commonsensical, often leaving them unquestioned. Butler refers to these established norms as sedimented and the process as sedimentation: "What might be understood as the history which has become internal to a name, has come to constitute the contemporary meaning of a name: the sedimentation of its usages as they have become part of the very name" (1997a: 36). She is not alone in asserting the calcification of memories through repetition; Jan Assmann firmly situates the role norm concretion plays in memory: "The objectivation or crystallization of communicated meaning and collectively shared knowledge is a prerequisite of its transmission *in the culturally*

institutionalized heritage of a society" (Assmann 1995: 130). Moreover, the way in which sedimentation occurs closely parallels Rothberg's multidirectional memory:

> One cannot know in advance how the articulation of a memory will function; nor can one even be sure that it will function in only one way. The concept of multidirectional memory holds memory open to these different possibilities, but does not subscribe to a simple pluralism, either. (Butler 2009: 16)

Whereas "competitive" accounts argue that a scarcity space for mainstream memories exists, Butler would counter that the sedimented norms are incessantly open to reinterpretation and reorganization. What makes Butler's account unique is her ability to integrate sedimentation through repetition with a much wider armory of conceptual tools under the umbrella of performativity.

The meaning enveloped in memories is only sustained if it is constantly reenacted, merely giving the semblance of being past, with Butler writing, "Performativity is thus not a singular 'act,' for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition" (2011: xxi). This current repetition constructs identity and memory by means of repeating sedimented norms. The point is not that memories are frivolous, which they are not. Rather, without the performance of memory, it does not exist. One might argue here that if everything is based on repetition, how do new rituals come to be installed. There were clearly no precedents for remembering 9/11 or the Holocaust before the actual events, so were their first commemorations actually a repetition?

The answer to this can be found in citationality, or the referencing of social norms to justify acts: "[The norm] is 'cited' as such a norm [or sedimentation], but it also derives its power through the citation it compels" (Butler 2011: xxii). Citationality has two very significant implications. The first is in line with Dietrich Harth's (2010: 87) understanding of "invention" that rejects the creation of memory "*ex nihilo*," i.e., memory coming from nothing. Harth makes the claim that memory cannot be constructed if there is no event that would presuppose its commemoration. For Butler, not only is the previous event – the episodic memory – based on previously established conventions, whereby "a contemporary 'act' emerges in the context of a chain of binding conventions" (Butler 2011: 171), but so is the instrumental memory. This interpretation of instrumental memory makes heritage studies an essential companion to Butler, as the manner in which events, objects or spaces are commemorated is envisioned to shape meaning. As Eriksen explains about historically prized objects, "People have taken an interest in material remains from the past in other periods too, but for other reasons. Hence,

their evaluations have been structured along other lines of thought" (2014: 8-9). Parades, monuments, statues, paintings, street naming and memorial sites are all methods – or instrumental memories – in which episodic memory is expressed. When a new event comes to be recognized, it is through current commemoration practices that we are able to perform it. Thus, episodic and instrumental memory are never constant but always reshaping one another.

The other implication of citationality involves how memories change: "A citation will be at once an interpretation of the norm and an occasion to expose the norm itself as a privileged interpretation" (Butler 2011: 71). Put more directly, memory relies on repetition to keep its sedimented status, but this need to continually reassert itself makes it vulnerable to unfaithful repetitions: "The future of the signifier of identity can only be secured through a repetition that fails to repeat loyally, a reciting of the signifier that must commit a disloyalty against identity – a catachresis" (Butler 2011: 167). The subversion of conventions through unintended repetitions is a quintessential facet of cultural memory. For instance, when the *Memorial to the Victims of the German Invasion* appeared in Budapest in 2014, it quickly became a locale of heated protests. The statue depicts the Archangel Gabriel, representing the Hungarian nation, being attacked by the German imperial eagle, representing the Nazi invasion. Many were angered by the symbolism exonerating the Hungarian nation for the atrocities committed during WWII, including its participation in the deportation and eventual execution of 450,000 Jews. Shortly thereafter, a makeshift "exhibit" of various relics, notes and photographs of Holocaust victims was set up across from the statue to contest the government's narrative. While the government employed the conventional norm of symbolic statues, this rival "exhibit" used concrete and real objects that one would see in museum displays.[1] In essence, they were using tried and true instrumental memories in their presentation of the episodic memory for juxtaposition. However, subversion can work in a multitude of ways towards a number of ends; many times, these subversions go on to reinforce a hegemonic memory. Just consider the role of wartime propaganda films, whereby the past is remembered using subversive means to reinforce the state actor.

In her post-9/11 writings, Butler was drawn to the question of which lives were livable, or rather which subjects' lives were made unlivable or difficult due to social norms: "What makes for a grievable life?" (Butler 2004: 18). More succinctly, she posits that "local conceptions of what is human or, indeed, of what the basic conditions and needs of human life are, must be subjected to reinterpretation, since there are historical and cultural circumstances in which the human is defined differently" (Butler 2004: 37) Though this may seem somewhat

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1 For more information on the monument, see (Oparnica, 2015).

unrelated for our inquiry, by revising Butler's question, one comes to a central issue for cultural memory: what makes for a memorable life? What criteria must be met for a cultural memory to be accepted by a society? What are the rules and relationships that arise in this decision-making process? The importance of these questions should not be discarded either. By switching "human" to "memory" in the following quotation from Butler, this becomes explicitly clear:

If I am a certain gender, will I still be regarded as part of the [memory]? Will the "[memory]" expand to include me in its reach? If I desire in certain ways, will I be able to live? Will there be a place for my life, and will it be recognizable to the others upon whom I depend for my social existence? (Butler 2004: 2-3).

How memory is performed often has a significant impact on minorities and inclusion. For instance, there has been an increase in Islamophobia and discrimination against individuals from Middle Eastern countries or backgrounds since 9/11, largely because of how these individuals were interpellated into the memory of these events. Another example of this would be the strong assertion many religious individuals in the Western world hold regarding Christ being Caucasian, which has been a way to, quite literally, white-wash religious and ethnic memory.

This testament to constant reconstruction just means that memory changes, as almost any empirical study will show. As a pioneer in this field, Halbwachs had already latched onto this: "A remembrance is in very large measure a reconstruction of the past achieved with data borrowed from the present, a reconstruction prepared, furthermore, by reconstructions of earlier periods wherein past images had already been altered" (1980: 69). If this is the case, what then is Butler able to offer memory studies? Most significantly, she offers coherency and compatibility. Butler's theory of performativity, as has been shown, overlaps with many writers on memory. Her procedural framework (interpellation, subject constitution, repetition, sedimentation, citationality, subversion) allows these piecemeal notions to be bound together and put into dialogue. Second, by proposing an overarching process for memory formation and maintenance, Butler provides a thorough account of why memories "emerge" at certain points in time and disappear at others; the emphasis on emerge, rather than manufacture or produce, is moreover essential because according to Butler's principle of subversive repetition, even those acts which we believe are fully in our control are open to contestation, different interpretations and ultimately change. In the case of Hungary's statue, the government's attempt to put a "glorious" statue in downtown Budapest has become a tourist hotspot highlighting a dark past that many would not have known otherwise. The question that inevitably arises from such an inquiry, nonetheless, is (a) what lives are memorable and (b) how are they memorable?

Performing a National Memory in Turkey

The commemoration of Turkey's 2016 failed coup d'etat contains a plethora of easily tangible instances of Butlerian performativity engaging with prominent threads of Turkish memory politics, such as secularism, democracy, Islamism and nationalism. Since memory is performative in that it is "insistently constituted, contested, and negotiated" (Butler 2011: 44), showing how this event recently happened yet was thrust into historical and political narratives reinforces the notion that memory is present rather than past. However, it should be noted that this is meant to be an illustrative rather than an exhaustive analysis; the basic memory dynamics presented are sufficient for the purposes of operationalizing Butlerian performativity. Additionally, Turkey is not unique but is simply a nice instantiation of memory practices. Because of this, we can see the sparing ideologies influencing this cultural memory and eliciting the complexities involved. While people typically think of the state versus minority memories, the case of Turkey shows that this framework ignores the fact that the state is often split. Turkey's Islamist-oriented government is struggling against a long tradition of state oppression, as well as a state institutionally organized to serve the purposes of a Kemalist ideology.

With this in mind, we can say that memory has proven to be highly volatile in Turkish politics (Aydoğan and Slapin 2015, Demiralp 2007, Tepe 2005), and though it is an immense area to study, we can limit our analysis to some key Turkish themes. The military's historical role has been as self-proclaimed arbiters of Kemalist thought, which is based on the founder of the Turkish Republic Kemal Atatürk's philosophy (Çalışkan 2016, Demirel 2004, Gürses 2017). Thus, there is a long tradition of memorializing the "secular" in Turkey, which has adapted and changed over the years (Navaro-Yashin 2002, Özyürek 2006, 2007). While this was largely the hegemonic public memory in Turkey until the 2000s, there were open contestations to its predominance earlier on, and these largely appeared in the development of an Islamist political and working class in recent decades (Nasr 2009, Tezcür 2010) and tensions with various minorities and their cultural memories, most notably Turkey's Kurdish minority (e.g., Güneş 2012, Gürbüz 2016, Marcus 2009). In this way, the current ruling party *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party, AKP) and their de facto ruler Recep Tayyip Erdoğan have employed a variety of memory techniques at the level of a political narrative to frame a new national trajectory (Bakıner, 2013; Maessen, 2014; Parlak and Aycan, 2016). Along with this, there has been a campaign against AKP's former-ally-turned-foe Fethullah Gülen and his Gülenist movement. While being an Islamic cleric devoted to global education initiatives, Gülen began to show disagreements with the AKP and Erdoğan specifically, resulting in a widespread disinformation campaign against him, and even the labeling of the movement as

a terrorist organization. In the aftermath of the coup, Gülenists were prejudicially targeted by the government, and they have widely been used as scapegoats to oppress political dissidents not associated to the group at all.

It is also worth noting that two dilemmas have nevertheless crept into the AKP's governing style in recent years which are immanent in their role in commemorating the failed coup. First, there has been a trend of creeping Islamic conservatism and authoritarianism (Menderes 2018, Geri 2017), which many citizens have adamantly resisted. Though the AKP initially presented itself as a moderate conservative party in 2001, Erdoğan's desire to raise a "pious generation" (Lüküslü, 2016), the introduction of religious symbolism into the national narrative (Damar 2016, Demiralp 2007) and the view of ruling unilaterally through an "electoral hegemony" (Keyman and Gümüşçü 2014) have overshadowed this image. In doing so, the boundaries of the "secular" political establishment, which has traditionally kept Islamists out of political decision-making through severe oppression, has slowly decayed (Menderes 2018: 130, Somer 2014). The second dilemma is a legitimacy crisis due to AKP's persistence in ignoring large segments of the population outside its voting base (Damar 2016, Tekdemir 2016), with the most visible resistance being the Gezi Park Protests in 2013. Constant references to the *milli irade* (national will) show the ruling party's increasing desire to be perceived as the voice of all Turkish people, which would prevent them from having to go to the negotiating table with groups of contrasting ideologies (Geri 2017). These two politically confrontational aspects of the AKP's governing model provide some key indicators of how the failed coup has been remembered and the political ambitions woven into its symbolism.

Late in the evening of July 15, 2016, reports started coming in about military personnel blocking off the Bosphorus Bridge in Istanbul. Shortly thereafter, people in Ankara started flooding social media outlets with comments and videos of F16 fighter jets circling the capital, and citizens started to come to the realization that a military coup was unraveling. A faction of the military had launched measures to take over the government, which included holding high ranking officials hostage, storming the TRT state broadcasting building, Erdoğan pleading for citizens to take to the streets on national television, tanks parking in front of parliament, which later faced aerial bombardment, and the deaths of hundreds. By dawn, the coup had failed, but it would not be easily forgotten. Rallies around the country were scheduled to celebrate the government's democratic triumph against the coup plotters, establishing a precedent for the memory of the events in the years to come. All of this was to play out in an already tense political atmosphere where memory is often deployed along very strict ideological lines. Drawing from Butler's toolbox to help make sense of the pursuant memories this led to, I will discuss a few cases of performative memory of the failed coup.

July 15 Red Crescent National Will Metro

If a naïve tourist happened to walk through Kızılay – the Turkish word for "Red Crescent" and Ankara's main transport hub – on July 16th, they might assume that an Independence Day celebration was occurring similar to the USA's Fourth of July. In the years since the coup, this has become the central site in Ankara for memorializing the coup's failure, revealing a large degree of participation in the memory formation process. It also illustrates one way in which Turks have actively taken up the interpellation at play in this largely AKP-endorsed event. Aside from being the midway point for commuters, this location has been sedimented as the social center of the city; people gathered there during the Gezi Park Protests as well as the rally held the day after the failed coup.

One prominent method of commemoration is the (re)naming of a public entity after a momentous person or event, functioning as one of the core sedimented conventions in memory practices. The Turkish government cited just this when renaming the Kızılay Metro to the *15 Temmuz Kızılay Milli İrade Metro* (July 15 Red Crescent National Will Metro) as well as the park situated above it, previously known as *Kızılay Meydanı* (Red Crescent Square), to the *15 Temmuz Kızılay Milli İrade Meydanı* (July 15 Red Crescent National Will Square). While a seemingly reasonable name considering the circumstances, the deployment of national symbols, particularly the phrase *milli irade*, relayed a sentiment that would re-legitimize the government's ruling tactics through subversive repetition.

The day after the coup, a large group marched from parliament to the aforementioned square, less than a kilometer in distance, to hold a rally celebrating the power of the masses. Thus, while a wholly new event, they were citing the act of marching as a commemorative technique. What is worth noting, though often remaining unspoken, was that Turkey's past coups have been performed by Kemalists within the military who viewed themselves as the voice of the nation, especially when it came to protecting state institutions from Islamist movements. Renaming these places to include *milli irade* in reference to the Islamist-leaning government has been, in Butler's framework, to assert the image of the AKP being the *real* voice of the nation. This subversive repetition of the *milli irade* allowed the AKP to try and alter the meaning of what it meant to be a member of the Turkish nation. In doing so, they attempted to interpellate all Turkish citizens as submissive to their voice – just as the Kemalist institutions before them had – and as these annual rallies have shown, there is still a significant portion of the Turkish population interpellating themselves into this narrative.

When performed against the backdrop of unprecedented post-coup purges, it constituted Turkish citizens as either for the AKP's vision or as traitors to the nation, thereby further impacting national identity through memory. In this way, the commemoration of the coup became a political tool for establishing and

circulating the memory of the events, especially in terms of their significance and meaning. What is unique about these commemorative rallies and the subsequent renaming of the metro is that it was largely driven by mass participation from Turks, which was the real driving force behind this performance of memory. Unlike the next example, the event relied on a group of people who not only constituted themselves within this narrative, but they showed an eagerness to do so that was not entirely shaped by the ruling party. According to this narrative, an authoritative military faction was overcome by the sheer will of citizens, thereby strengthening the potential for the AKP to claim legitimacy. Though all citizens have not passively accepted this interpellation, there have been many who joyfully engage in the repetition of this memory. This should be seen as a site where the ruling party took advantage of the memory, yet they can hardly be said to have manufactured this one in particular. In other words, it is not the sheer political tools of the Islamist-leaning government that control this memory; it has relied on large-scale participation in its memorialization.

This event came to be structured as a historical turning point in the nation. One unique feature of the metro station is a small section, the *Metro Sanat Galerisi* (Metro Art Gallery), displaying photographic exhibits from Turkish history. In August 2016, an exhibit was featured entitled *15 Temmuz Demokrasi ve Şehitler Günü Fotoğraf Sergisi* (July 15 Democracy and Martyrs' Day Photograph Exhibition).[2] The establishment of this exhibit in a space conventionally used to depict history elevated the status of the event from a political to a historical one. In terms of interpellation, Metropolitan Municipality Press and Public Relations Department Head Ahmet Recep Tekcan said at the opening of the exhibit, "We will not forget what these traitors did and what they do" (Ankara Büyükşehir Belediyesi 2016). Alongside him, images of a destructive past, eerily bringing prior regimes to mind, were juxtaposed with the promise and potential of the people who had come out to support the ruling party and the country's democratic institutions. Thus, the space itself not only repeats these events on a site dedicated to history – thereby citing the norms of historical exhibitions – but also cites the norms of democratic legitimacy. In Butler's framework, then, the commemoration of the failed coup cited traditional mechanisms (renaming, rallies, history exhibits) that repeated the memory of a *milli irade* and Kemalist thought in an entirely subversive manner.

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[2] For more information on the display (in Turkish) along with some photos from the exhibit itself, see (Ankara Büyükşehir Belediyesi 2016).

July 15 Martyrs' Memorial

There is a stoutly sedimented norm for the role statues and concrete monuments play in memory practices, which is something the *15 Temmuz Şehitler Anıtı* (July 15 Martyrs' Memorial) wholly embraces. Located directly across from the controversially constructed presidential palace, the marble monument reaches 31.4 meters, consisting of four columns that resemble hanging fabric; these columns lead up to a platform where seven anonymous individuals are holding up a Red Crescent.[3] The four pilasters represent the traditional Turkish saying *Tek Millet, Tek Bayrak, Tek Vatan, Tek Devlet* (One Nation, One Flag, One Motherland, One State). The seven human figures supporting the Red Crescent represent the country's seven regions, and the names of all 81 Turkish cities as well as a map of the country are engraved into one of the columns. Another column has the Red Crescent of the Turkish flag, and yet another has the presidential seal and stars symbolizing all the Turkic states. The final column consists of a mob of people piling on top of one another, some holding flags, as they ascend the pillar. Inside the columns, where the Islamic *Salah* prayer is played 24/7, are the pictures and names of the 249 individuals who died on the night of coup (Anka News Agency 2018).[4] While a seemingly innocuous conglomeration, a variety or elements are being cited in a manner that tries to subvert meaning.

As mentioned earlier, the two crises of the AKP government revolve around a problem with attesting their democratic legitimacy and the dilemma of inserting Islamic symbolism into Kemalist institutions. In this respect, the *15 Temmuz Şehitler Anıtı* perfectly captures how political narratives are woven into memory practices. The unanimity of the Turkish *milli irade* is highly cited, which in turn allows other symbols in the monument to be projected onto all Turkish citizens via interpellation. In terms of repetition, the four columns are indicative of a unified nation with singular ambitions. The seven figures and inscriptions of the 81 cities makes it clear that this monument envelops the sentiments of the nation as a whole. In other words, although Turkey is a democracy, the government speaks on behalf of all citizens. All of these elements reference strongly sedimented political norms. However, the four pillars ascending to the Red Crescent would easily call to mind another notable monument: the Çanakkale Şehitler Anıtı (Çanakkale Martyrs' Memorial). The memorial opened to the public in 1960 and serves as a "tomb of the unknown soldier" for those who died at the Battle of Çanakkale during WWI.[5] Considered as a citation of this earlier performance of memory,

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[3] For official images and information (in English) from the Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, see (Presidency of the Republic of Turkey 2017).

[4] Of course, this only includes those resisting the coup, not vice versa.

[5] For more on this monument from the official Australian website, as the commemorative monument remembers both Turkish and Australian deceased soldiers, see (Australia's Department of Veterans' Affairs n.d.).

the *15 Temmuz Şehitler Anıtı* behaves as a memorial site not only for those who died but all the unsung heroes who rose up *together* against forces that sought to destroy the nation, or so the narrative would go. It provides a sense of anonymity to those involved while subversively citing this fallen soldier style memorial so as to universalize anti-coup participation to all Turkish citizens by interpellating them as active supporters of the nation.

In more direct terms, the *milli irade* as a "privileged occasion exists only through being instituted and reiterated, and, by virtue of that temporalization, is unstable and open to subversive repetition" (Butler 2011: 56); it is precisely this ability to alter meaning through repetition that the AKP has sought to seize hold of. However, unlike the previous performance of memory, this experiment was solely pushed by the state, and the inability to access the site by the general population seems to have undermined the venture entirely. On my trip to Ankara in the summer of 2018, almost everyone I talked to had no idea the monument even existed despite its ubiquitous coverage in news outlets. While the ideology was in place for a revised version of the *milli irade* and the citations were rather clear, this monument failed to properly interpellate Turkish citizens, likely due to the fact that it was an effort to produce a memory from above. In the case of the Kızılay metro, it emerged as a result of spontaneous mass participation, which allowed the site to be kept alive in the years to come. In other words, the exclusivity of the monument, the fact that it was not a geographically significant location for the coup and the forced national symbolism, which are frequently used in the planning and construction of monuments, caused the monument to fail – at least for now – in establishing a successful performance of memory.

Still, what makes these symbols more politically paramount is the inclusion of the more partisan references. The fact that the term şehitler (martyrs) was employed in the title of the memorial is significant because it is conventionally used for soldiers killed in the line of duty. In fact, the domestic conflict between the government and the PKK since the 1980s, amassing in thousands of deaths, has meant that this word constantly appears in news broadcasts. The severity of the term and its inclusion, especially in reference to non-military individuals, is no small feat. Additionally, while the horde of individuals ascending one of the columns seems fitting when all is considered, it is an almost irrevocable callback to a previously banned political commercial the AKP aired in 2014. Showing the Turkish flag is illegal in political advertisements in Turkey, but a couple weeks before a general election in 2014, the AKP aired a commercial where a mysterious dark figure releases a Turkish flag from a flagpole, and it begins to descend downwards. As people from all across Turkey see the flag falling, they rush towards it and build a human pyramid to raise it back up.[6] By citing this commercial, the

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[6] For additional details on the commercial, see (Bender, 2014).

implication is not that the Turkish government in general speaks for the people; rather, one particular political party, the AKP, does. Moreover, if the Islamic symbolism had not been clear enough, the fact that the Islamic *Salah* prayer plays nonstop at the center of the memorial shows that a very different national narrative is being performed. In Butlerian parlance, the monument represents a subversion that begins to construct certain social meanings for the events by painting them with an ideological brush. It aims to legitimize – unsuccessfully in this case – the current government by interpellating all Turkish citizens as supportive, situating a religious doctrine at the heart of that support.

Resisting the Purge

The previous examples elicited two performances of memory, one successful and one unsuccessful, in commemorating the coup, but these were largely based on a narrative that supported the failure of the coup and painted its effects as democratic. It is thus helpful to turn to commemorations working against this hegemonic narrative. The first performative counter-memory is the 2017 *Adalet Yürüyüşü* (March for Justice). The name of the march, which elicits the Turkish word for justice, appears to be a direct citation of the AKP's party name, which can be interpreted as an attempt to subversively re-appropriate this term. Immediately after the failed coup, a state of emergency was declared, lasting until July 2018. During this period, there was a rampant crackdown on political dissent extending far beyond the typical political channels. A website was even set up under the title of *TurkeyPurge* to document the extent of the persecution, which has resulted in tens of thousands of arrests – including hundreds of journalists – the closure of over a hundred media outlets and the investigation of hundreds of thousands of individuals.[7] The march was planned when an oppositional parliamentarian, Enis Berberoğlu, was sentenced to prison for providing a Turkish newspaper with a video of Turkey's intelligence agency smuggling weapons into Syria. At that point, the leader of the main opposition party – which is also the historically Kemalist party – Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu announced the march and even penned an editorial piece in the *New York Times* explaining his rationale (Kilicdaroglu 2017). The notion of marching as a sign of protest is a notorious citation of memory practices, and thousands of Turks attended this march from Ankara to Istanbul, which was led by Kılıçdaroğlu. The march ended with a rally in the Maltepe neighborhood of Istanbul, and hundreds of thousands arrived to show their support. This case of counter-memory illustrates that there is a strong resistance to the pro-government narrative about the failed coup, and Turks took this chance to interpellate

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[7] For a complete list of those affected by the purge, visit turkeypurge.com.

themselves into this counter-narrative, thereby constituting themselves as resisting the memory practices of the ruling party.

The next case to investigate will be a more academic project started at Boston University entitled "Undaunted Voices of Turkey: Stories of Women who Resist." It focuses on gathering and releasing interviews with Turkish women oppressed in the coup's aftermath. As the project's website explains, "As an independent group of women, we have volunteered to share the stories of women who have deeply suffered from the purges but insisted on resisting the oppression" (N.A. 2017). This specific project presents some excellent depictions of Butler's theory of performativity while also highlighting some limitations of its operationalization. For starters, oral history has been rather prolific in cultural memory studies (e.g., Abrams 2016, Hamilton and Shopes 2008), and using these to provide alternative, subjective testimonies allows interested listeners/readers to see how these events were remembered by those oppressed by the memory. Thus, there is a whole sedimented field of academic practice that is being cited in the performative repetition of these testimonies. However, these will probably be of more value in the future. It is certainly invaluable to see how these women interpellate and constitute themselves. For instance, in the testimony entitled "Upside Down," the narrator vividly explains how she interpellated herself and how the government interpellated her, and the consequences of unwilful subject constitution:

> On July 15th when we were having tea and sunflower seeds, all of a sudden they have declared us traitors. Until this time my husband and I had many awards and recognitions in the Ministry of National Education. I had prominent awards in my profession. But in just a single day I was declared uneducated. (N.A. 2017)

Nevertheless, beyond the thirty interviewed women, operationalizing these aspects of interpellation and subject constitution is somewhat limited. We yet again run into the importance of combining Butler's performativity with more contextualized, limited and focused cultural memory research inquiries.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

Butler's theory of performativity provides excellent interrelated tools that can interpretively decipher not only how memory emerges but how it is kept up. All of these performances of memory cited both conventional methods of remembrance, such as statues, exhibits, rallies and renaming, as well as contextual cues from Turkish politics and history. In doing so, these norms were repeated in a way that allowed for their subversion in the commemoration of the failed coup. More

than simply commemorating the event, they established fundamental meaningful connections that symbolized a political narrative extending well beyond the events themselves. This symbolism interpellated individuals, willingly or unwillingly, into uniquely framed social identities, which is especially telling against the concurrent backdrop of rampant political persecution. As Butler notes, it is precisely from this ritual that political meaning is ever able to arise: "The notion of ritual suggests that it is performed, and that in the repetition of performance a belief is spawned, which is then incorporated into the performance in its subsequent operations" (1997b: 119). Importantly, this depicts memory as performative, and some of the tools Butler provides are ones that are already cornerstones of cultural memory studies. What is unique here is the ability to view memory as a process, one where many stages can be assessed in combination or isolation. The question then turns to which lives are memorable.

Conclusion

Memory, politics and identity are fundamentally interwoven, and at least according to Butler's interpretation, memory can severely limit one's participation in the memory of their identity and the politics of memory. How one is remembered becomes enmeshed in how one is permitted or allotted to be remembered. This assertion makes Butler's inquiry into livable lives, or rather "memorable" lives, an increasingly urgent issue: "What makes for a livable life is no idle question. It is not merely a question for philosophers" (Butler 2004: 17). While the military coup was carried out by a faction within the Turkish military, many of the soldiers involved did not realize what was going on until it was already underway; they were then left to deal with the consequences as their superiors, who planned it, were slowly removed from the scene. However, up until this point, their stories have been subdued, with the exception of those few soldiers who escaped to Greece. As we saw from the oral testimonies, hundreds of thousands of memories were delegitimized within a matter of days, as *TurkeyPurge.com* kept track of. The procedural route that memory takes, through interpellation and subject constitution to repetition and sedimentation via citationality, provides a diagram for grasping how memories are subverted over time. Butler thus captures the morphology of memories: "As the effects of a subtle and politically enforced performativity, gender [or memory] is an 'act,' as it were, that is open to splittings, self-parody, self-criticism, and those hyperbolic exhibitions of 'the natural'" (2010: 200). The memory practices that followed the failed coup largely involved telling the actual memory of the "Turk," so who was considered to be a Turk became immensely invaluable and the crux upon which much of this memory work depended upon.

Turkey's memory practices show how conventional methods were deployed to formulate something entirely new, yet the driving force behind this is not memory but identity. One could certainly argue that this is more of a manufacturing of a memory on behalf of the Turkish state, but the reason this is an emergence is because no one group or individual has the final say on what this memory means. The role identity played in Turkey's memory was intricately bound to political realities that sought to re-situate the character of national identity. This does not mean that these disparate strategies were using memory nefariously per se, but rather that the performance of memory is an inherently contextual act in that it is always performed within a specific era with certain motives. At the same time, the groups who resisted the interpellation cannot be said to have "lost" this memory battle, as space for subversion exists, and will always exist. In essence, the importance of assessing it as such resonates Foucault's warning: "My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous" (1983: 231). It becomes necessary to investigate and understand how memory emerges and functions because it can, consciously or unconsciously, be dangerous. As Butler argues, and again we can switch the term "human" here for "memorable," "Local conceptions of what is [memorable] or, indeed, of what the basic conditions and needs of [memorable] life are, must be subjected to reinterpretation, since they are historical and cultural circumstances in which [memory] is defined differentially" (2004: 37). In essence, cultural memory studies is an ongoing process, one that must actively investigate the limits of memory work and how memory is performed; at the same time, it must keep in mind a central and potentially life-threatening dynamic: What makes for a memorable life?

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