Title

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Research on new transnational spaces, such as online forums, has increased during the past ten years, illustrating their impact on migratory lives in different parts of the world. Much of the literature on the diasporic use of online communities draws on discussions of hybridity and identity, exploring the ways in which identities are negotiated and created within transnational spaces.[1] These spaces can be seen as part of larger socio-cultural transitions connected with mobility and globalization that shape the boundaries of nation-states. Online interactions seem to maintain, add and expand connections beyond national borders to different parts of the world with informal, personal, political, and commercial engagements. The research on transnational media and migration offers different and sometimes contradictory views on the ways in which media shape identities and posit individuals in terms of citizenship and a sense of belonging. First, research depicts diasporic media use often as either nostalgic or ordinary, depending on the context of diaspora and on the media in question. Second, the impact of diasporic media use is seen either to lead to increasingly "ghettoed" isolation or to enhance connected hybridity and transnational sensibility, again, depending upon the context of the research.

In the context of migration and diaspora, media are central to creating a sense of community, belonging and shared experiences. Peter Mandaville, in his research on Islamic online communities states:

> More than anything else the Internet and other information technologies provide spaces where Muslims, who often find themselves to be a marginalized or extreme minority group in many western communities, can go in order to find others 'like them'. It is in this sense that we can speak of the Internet as allowing Muslims to create a new form of imagined community, or a reimagined Islam. (183)

In a similar way, online media provide space for various other diasporic groups for reconstructing a sense of community and belonging. In this sense, then, participating in an online community can be seen as a way of becoming discursively emplaced, which Hamid Naficy has discussed in terms of being virtually reterritorialized (4). Reterritorialization here refers to a process of anchoring oneself culturally in a new context through social media, a virtual community or a homepage. While virtual worlds may ease the sense of alienation or help to build new transnational communities of sharing, we should be cautious not to claim an overly deterministic or essentialist relation between media and identity, which are complexly interconnected with, and shaped by, social and material factors. I would emphasize that media is a space that *enables* various kinds of identity formation, rather than *causing* them.

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[1] See for example research by Elias and Zeltser-Shorer on the ways in which online communication was used by young people with Russian origins in Israel, Myria Georgiou's research on the media use by Cypriot community in Britain, significance of online communication for immigrant identities in Canada by Ibrahim, Peter Mandaville's research on Islamic online communities in Britan, the by Ananda Mitra and Hamid Naficy's work on relevance of homepage to diasporic audiences.

The purpose of this essay is not to make causal connections between identity and online memory work, but to point out the particular mundane and transnational dimensions that are emerging within online remembering. While traditionally a sense of shared experience is constructed through national media, newspapers and mainstream television (Anderson 25), transnational online sites challenge the construct of a single, shared national public sphere and suggest a move toward multiple spheres. According to Marie Gillespie, technological development deconstructs spatial and time-bound geopolitical boundaries, thus challenging the very meaning of national culture (165). While crossing distances and connecting with other people around the world is not limited to diasporic experience, virtual remembering may have specific significance in the context of migration, as the following cases aim to show.

This essay discusses the construction of the past on three different kinds of online sites: a Kurdish collective-memory site ("akaKURDISTAN"), a German-Kurdish online community ("Kurdmania") and a German-Finnish online community ("Suomalaiset.de"). These websites can be seen as sites of memory work, where collective notions of identity and the past are negotiated. In these virtual memory spaces, everyday memory work, or "banal" remembering, takes place, while the actual geographical places are left behind. This essay operationalizes the concept of communicative memory as defined by Assmann (126), and connects it with research on online media and migration in order to argue that online communities operate as new, open, complex, and often mundane sites for constructing memories. As I hope to show, these sites indicate a shift toward open, evolving and multiple representations of memories, and they emphasize transnational dimensions of identity and memory that depart from national collective memory.

Online Memories: Kurdistan

The question of homeland is a burning issue for the Kurdish diaspora, representing the symbolic struggle of a nation-in-the-making. Since Kurdistan is not a recognized state, identifying a homeland continues to be an on-going and contested project for Kurdish people living in Europe and in other parts of the world. As Amir Hassanpour argues (79), the idea of a single Kurdistan confronts the complexity of different political, social and linguistic systems stemming from the division of Kurdistan among four Middle-Eastern states (Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria), which has contributed to the reproduction, rather than erasure, of these borders through diaspora.

Discourses of the past in the context of migration tend to evoke a sense of nostalgia, particularly when a past homeland is not in reach for various political and economic reasons[2]. In Julia Creet's words, "Displacement makes the working-through of traumatic times and events much more difficult. Distance makes it hard to move on" (14). Laurenn Guyot (140) argues that immigration places memory in a new context, with a new set of demands for collective meaning-making. In this context, through distance and separation, the need to protect memory is heightened. In the context of the Kurdish diaspora, Guyot has identified a "myth" of return based on a

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[2] See for example research by Nelly Elias and Marina Zeltser-Shorer on the ways in which online communication was used by young people with Russian origins in Israel, Myria Georgiou's research on the media use by Greek-Cypriot community in Britain, significance of online communication for immigrant identities in Canada by Awad Ibrahim, Peter Mandaville's research on Islamic online communities in Britan, the by Ananda Mitra and Hamid Naficy's work on relevance of homepage to diasporic audiences.

frozen conception of territory and the preservation of traditional values. She claims that "Kurds who have immigrated seem to be stuck in time, trapped in a memory ghetto while their counterparts in Turkey are trying to adapt to modernity" (140). Based on her research, Guyot emphasizes fixity and political exclusion as part of the construction of collective memory. Similarly, in his research on media use by Iranians in Los Angeles, Hamid Naficy emphasizes the nostalgic value of media to diasporic communities (*The Poetics and Practice* 298–299). He describes the significance of the Iranian television channels in terms of their celebratory remembrance of a lost homeland and their depictions of a frozen past. It is noteworthy that the diasporic group in question has left its homeland because of the Islamic Revolution, which has generated a strong sense of loss and longing, in contrast to other diasporic groups whose relation to their homelands can be more frequent and interactive (Robins and Aksoy).

The Kurdish memory website akaKURDISTAN (http://www.akakurdistan.com), the first case study of this essay, can be seen as a similar kind of nostalgic use of media that constructs a myth of homeland with celebratory remembering. However, while the other examples above were connected with television or print media, a website allows for a more open-ended relation to the past that challenges the idea of a fixed memory. Devoted to collecting memories of the Kurdish people, akaKURDISTAN declares itself "a borderless space" that provides "an opportunity to build a collective memory with a people who have no national archive." The English-language website is built around a book on Kurdish history, *Kurdistan: In the Shadow of History*,[3] a diverse collection of letters, images, reports, advertisements, maps, and personal memoirs that convey the fragmented and partial nature of Kurdish memory work without official national archives. The akaKURDISTAN website expands the book into the online space in order to collect different kinds of memories, from personal accounts to images and documents. With this structure akaKURDISTAN enhances the unofficial forms of remembering – the communicative memory.

The concept of "communicative memory," as defined by Jan Assmann (126) in response to Halbwachs and Warburg, refers to mundane forms of remembering. Communicative memory is born in everyday communication that is "characterized by a high degree of non-specialization, reciprocity of roles, thematic instability and disorganization" (126). For Assmann, "communicative memory" is interactive, individualistic, plural, and connected with unofficial modes of remembering. It is the everyday memory of individuals and their interpretations of the past. It bears no fixity, as the horizon of remembering changes with the passing of time. Cultural memory, on the other hand, is a more structured and established form of remembering largely produced by institutions, rather than individuals.

Clearly, the online world of open access and participation, with continuously changing and evolving contents embraces the notion of communicative memory. While the structure of akaKURDISTAN enhances open-ended and mundane memory, it also includes elements of nostalgia and the sacredness of the past. AkaKURDISTAN conveys the nostalgic sensibility of the past mostly through colors and design. The color tone resonates with a sentiment of the historic, in subdued, soft green, brown, and red. With the use of an old-fashioned map design, black-and-white images and cartographic wallpaper patterns, the website evokes the look of the past.

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[3] In a similar way, a website by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the author of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, a novel on the Nigerian-Biafran war from 1967 to 1970, collects individual memories and narratives of people who themselves or whose relatives experienced the war. http://www.halfofayellowsun.com

The site is divided into three sections, the first of which consists of a story map in the form of a geographical map of Kurdistan, indicating where different narratives took place (fig. 1). By clicking the locations, one can read personal memories added by other visitors to the site. The second section, the unknown image archive, invites people to identify images and tell the story behind each one. People can also send their own images to find out, with others' help, more about their photographs. In the third section, people can add their own stories and memories to the site. By collecting narratives and images of the past from its audience, the website uses the method of crowdsourcing in memory work to build an archive for the displaced and nationless.

Figure 1: An interactive "story map" of Kurdistan.
Source: http://.....

Images to be identified on the site are mostly from early 20th Century. One of them presents a group of cavalrymen cheering in front of a small town (fig. 2). Underneath the image, there are 34 contributions on the possible location of this particular image. The information gathered from readers suggests that the image depicts a group in Harran Urfa, southeastern Turkey, fighting against the Armenians sometime between 1914 and 1918. However, some contributors contest that hypothesis and argue that the

image is actually from the Suleymania area of Iraq, around the 1920s. Still others suggest that the photograph was possibly taken by an English missionary in connection with the Tiyare Christian uprising. Judging by the clothing the men are wearing, the scenery, and the housing, the contributors draw conclusions as to which area and historical context the image is situated in. Some contributors identify the source of the picture as originally published in The New York Times in 1915, whereas another recognizes the image as one from a book on Armenian genocide.

Figure 2: An unknown image to be identified.
Source: http://www.akakurdistan.com/kurds/identify/index.html

There is no final conclusion about the origins of the image or its historical context. Interpretation of the image remains open, multiple, and contested.

However, the process of collecting information and sharing views in itself provides knowledge on a variety of historical events connected to the Kurdish past. It also points out how fragmented historical narratives are and the degree to which the documents and interpretations that the understanding of the past relies on are contested. As such, it presents memory work as an on-going process that is contested and publicly open to all. Julia Creet argues that collective memory is rarely a singular phenomenon (14). Rather, it is often contested and easily configured, abused, and manipulated. Indeed, collective memory is not necessarily inclusive, and it can be highly political. This is also the case in the akaKURDISTAN website that aims to build public consciousness and collective memories in a highly political situation.

Kurdish memory work aims at recognition of the Kurdish people and the nation of Kurdistan, and it is a struggle with a state of in-betweenness, without an official

archive where memories are to be preserved. As Kurdish memory work is connected to nation building, remembering the past in this sense is also directed toward the future. In the processes of gathering collective memories and narratives of personal family fortune, and of speculating about and discussing the images and their origins, both the past and future are simultaneously present. However, unlike previous forms of collective memory work discussed by Creet, the online context renders the politics and the process of memory work public and available for potentially global audiences to evaluate.

AkaKURDISTAN is a carefully designed and well established website that offers insightful ways to collect memories and construct the past. The imagery of the past consists of diverse, artistically nostalgic imagery organized around old maps and photographs. In contrast to akaKURDISTAN's sophisticated notions of the past, various other online communities, focusing on everyday interaction, offer more fragmented, unromantic, mundane and banal sorts of memory work.

Mundane, Fortuitous Remembering

In their research, Menderes Candan and Uwe Hunger found 103 Kurdish websites with German domain names or discussion in German language, of which the majority were founded by Kurdish associations or organizations (131).[4] In addition to these websites, there are a large number of online communities operating in various European languages, as well as online sites that promote and distribute Kurdish music, films, literature, radio, and TV channels. Many of the Kurdish websites (Kurdland.com, Ekurd.net, Kurdistanpost.com, Kurdistanonline.net, Kurdi.dk) function as channels for information rather than as meeting places. In their analysis, Candan and Hunger point out the dominance of national symbols such as the Kurdish flag and the colours green, red, and white in the designs of the online sites (134). National heroes, myths, and symbols are circulated on the websites to strengthen national consciousness and a shared sense of origin. However, the transnational dimensions of these websites are connected with the new homelands of those who designed them and those who use them. This is illustrated through language choices and various activities shaped by the cultures and politics of the new home countries.

The hybrid identity positions emerging in such a space of two or more cultures (Bhabba, 217) often lay the groundwork for theorizing the migrant experience. Research in cultural studies and media studies identifies specific media spaces, such as Internet discussion forums, websites, and blogs, as particularly enhancing and embracing the construction of hybrid identities (Ibrahim 239, McGinnis et al. 284). However, websites that emerge as a result of migration do not automatically enhance hybridity. They may equally well include strong emphases, with nostalgic imagery, on the nation and ethnicity as fixed, which is largely the case with the second example of this essay, Kurdmania.org, a Germany-based Kurdish online community with a reported 2,136 members and an average of 161 members participating in discussions each day.

The top of the Kurdmania.org site is decorated with the colors of the Kurdish flag (fig. 3). The website offers news and feature stories in a webzine format, as well as a discussion forum, a gallery, and an archive of Kurdish history, important public figures, political struggles and the stories and images of the genocide. The narrative of

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[4] There are approximately 1.5 million Kurds living in Europe, of which, more than 700,000 live in Germany.

the Kurdish nation is reinforced through the abundance of images and texts available on the website (fig. 4). The gallery in itself offers a view into the ways in which national identity is defined and embodied through traditional cultural imagery of the past.

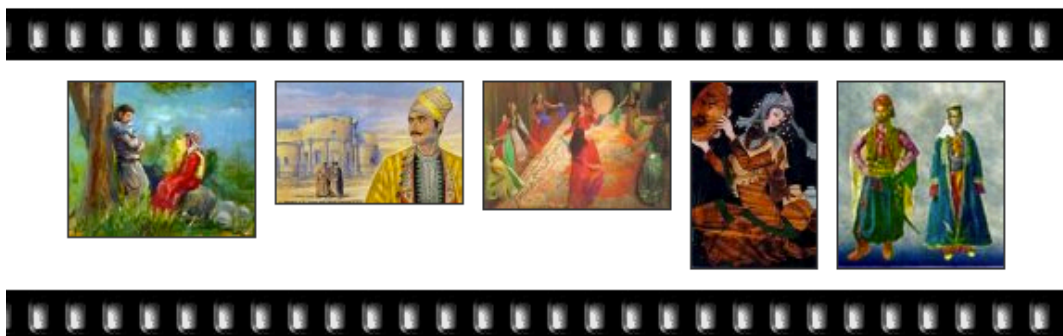**Figure 3: The colors of the Kurdish flag decorate Kurdmania.org**

Figure 4: Images of national identity in the gallery at Kurdmania.org.
Source: http://www.kurdmania.org/Gallery-act-displayimage-album-15-pos-0.html#gtop

The image gallery includes images and artwork reflecting Kurdish costumes and traditions. Again, cultural heritage is conveyed with the particular look and feel of the past: hand-painted images of Kurdish dancers in traditional outfits. A sense of the past is crafted through the imagery that highlights traditional Kurdish dance as a symbol of cultural specificity. The memory of the nation is embodied in the dance, in the

movement, not only preserving the Kurdish cultural heritage, but also illuminating the nation in non-discursive forms of expression. Other images depict people in rural settings, surrounded by nature or old houses. A traditional, simple way of living and rural scenery form the essence of these images, and, in that way, serve to connect the audience with what are intended to be seen as their authentic origins. Here, a simultaneous sense of the past and the future is emblematically present. Nostalgic imagery of the Kurdish countryside and its traditions lays the groundwork for the struggle over and the future of the nation. Imagery operates as legitimation of the struggle, with emphasis on Kurdish history and a particular set of traditions as specific markers of the nation.

The tendency to reinforce ethnic and national identities is often connected in precarious situations with political struggles that suppose or draw upon essentialist identities. Indeed, as Sari Hanafi argues, the Internet promotes new possibilities of re-anchoring culture and identity, thereby reinforcing ethnic identity (592). However, there are various ways in which this sense of fixed identity can be challenged. First of all, not all of the images on Kurdmania.org follow this sense of tradition and particular nostalgic imagery of the past. Amongst the traditional images, there is a contemporary photograph, most likely from a theatre production, of a young woman whose hands and mouth are tied with a red ribbon to convey her role as a victim or prisoner (fig. 5).

Figure 5: A symbol of the Kurdish struggle against oppression? Or, the suppression of women in Kurdish culture? Source: http://www.kurdmania.org/Gallery-act-displayimage-album-random-cat-0-pos-rnd822.html

The image can be seen as a symbol of the Kurdish struggle against oppression, a sentiment shared by the members of the forum. It can also be interpreted, however, as an illustration of the suppression of women in Kurdish culture and a cry for gender equality. As such, it may be a poignant critique of the shared, seemingly unanimous value base of the forum. Thus, within a seemingly coherent entity like Kurdmania.org, there can be ruptures and individual voices of dissent.

Still, such opportunities for dissent are tied to the very structure of the website and the configuration of openness it provides. The more options there are for debate, discussions, and individual contributions, the more probable it is to have contested, disparate and multi-voiced media spaces, even though the elements of contradiction may not always be explicit and apparent. Discussion forums on websites offer a structure that can accommodate challenges to the fixed and stable views of those communities or nations.

This is also evident in the discussion forum of Kurdmania.org, conducted mostly in German, and ranging from politics and religion to films and literature. The website is organized so that there are several categories, from current political discussions to Kurdish myths to general small talk. Much of the discussion focuses on the actual, current situation in the autonomous Kurdish area of Iraq (Kurdistan). For example, the discussion thread "Islamisch Kurdische Partei in Nordkurdistan?"[5] focuses on the question of religion in Kurdish politics with examples and references to German politics as well. Discussions are intense and argumentative, offering several views on the issue without any one view apparently dominating or concluding the discussion.Typically, these online discussions take place within a relatively small group of active discussants, and that is also the case with Kurdmania. Moreover, the arguments may focus on small nuances of particular political views, rather than major disagreements. However, the open and public format of these discussions provide a window into the contested nature of the group's political views and shows the level of acceptance of different opinions.

In addition to political debates, there are other kinds of interaction, such as humor, as in a discussion section dealing with political cartoons in the culture section of Kurdmania.org.[6] Interestingly, in that thread, members share cartoons by Turkish cartoonist Sefer Selvi, mostly concerning Turkish politics, and circulate them amongst themselves. The online community, in this context, serves to disseminate politically critical views that are under surveillance or considered delicate and even dangerous. Since many of the cartoons are in Turkish, some members help translate them into German, illustrating the participatory culture of sharing and exploring areas of interests together. Moreover, the cartoons demonstrate the power of humor in expressing political views, since their interpretation requires shared understanding of the codes and values that are being ridiculed or questioned. In this way, as Nancy Baym argues (*The Performance of Humor),* humor can be a powerful tool to bring people together and to serve as "a locus of group solidarity and emergent individuality". Yet it is also risky terrain, where shared understandings may easily be challenged.

The ways in which the past is interwoven in the mundane online context to create a collective understanding of Kurdish identity speaks of the ordinariness of diasporic memory work. Indeed, Robins and Aksoy suggest that transnational media work to

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[5] http://www.kurdmania.org/Forum-top-Islamisch-Kurdische-Partei-in-Nordkurdistan--6201.html
[6] http://www.kurdmania.org/Forum-top-aktuelle-politische-Karikaturen-4835.html

de-ethnosize and demythologize the homeland (10). Instead of emphasizing a sense of longing and nostalgia, they underscore a sense of the ordinary and the everyday, and argue that a homeland may be rendered ordinary through the possibility of following daily news and events from afar. With the example of Kurdmania, I would push the argument further and consider the sense of belonging as something continually in process, constructed, or in-the-making. As David Morley argues, the mystery of a sense of belonging, the desire to be part of a historical and cultural unit called "home" persists even in online communities (211). "Home" can mean various things, however, such as the idea of a safe and familiar space, rather than referring exclusively to a homeland. A sense of belonging can be seen then as connected with ritual, routine, and familiarity.

Media engender ritualistic space where social and spatial relations are organized by encapsulating emotions and experiences and organizing them in terms of categories of everyday life (Highmore 307–308; cf. Couldry). The regular use of media, familiar websites, communities and chat forums helps create a sense of belonging, which may be local, partial, and attached to a group of people, places, spaces, or actions. Kurdmania and akaKURDISTAN are illustrative of the ways in which refugee histories are recounted on social media with multiple sensibilities. They suggest a need to write about history and the past, but also to preserve traditions and identity within a new cultural context. Thus, while imagining homeland through online websites may engender nostalgia and longing, it is also an everyday activity, communicative or banal memory work, and its meanings are tightly bound to the everyday contexts of migration. This is what Assman (128) described as proximity to everyday life in communicative memory; the activity of imagining homeland follows the rhythms and routines of the familiar.

To see diasporic memory work as ordinary highlights media use as loose and ritualistic rather than intense and serious. Significantly, this perspective challenges widely circulated notions of media use by migrants as a practice that separates diasporic audiences in their own nostalgic world, as when Goyut claims that diasporic media use may prevent the process of integration (147). The emphasis on the ordinary, in contrast, underscores the ongoing connections and intertwined relations between now and then, here and there. Indeed a body of research on day-to-day media consumption by migrants in Europe points to a multiplicity of media use (Alghasi 30; Nikunen 158–159). Everyday media use is rarely confined to one medium, but rather characterized by multiplicity and a mixture of various national and transnational sources. As Sreberny argues (444), everyday media use points towards identity formation as "and/and" rather than "either/or," and emphasizes plural engagements, thereby countering notions of isolation and separation with hybridity and mixedness.

The Contested Past: Finns in Germany

The mundane memory work of Kurdmania is not emerging in a vacuum – even though online communication is often thought to be separated from the material world. The geographical, social and political contexts of migration shape the ways in which memories are presented and discussed online. Experiences of German society and politics shape the way members of Kurdmania see Kurdistan and its future. In a similar way, the Finnish website Suomalaiset.de is an example of a mundane and transnational website. The Finnish website offers a striking example of the ways in which the context of migration and relations to the host nation shape the ways in which past is, and can be, discussed.

Whereas the Kurdish websites are connected with the future-oriented process of nation-making, the memory work in the Finnish website deals with a contested past, shaped by Finland's shared history with Germany. More than 18,000 Finns currently live in Germany, most of whom have moved voluntarily because they have been offered a job in a multinational corporation or have found a German spouse. Hence, they are mostly well educated and represent the prosperous end of power geometry in the global movement of people so aptly described by Massey (22). However, many of the Finns moved to Germany after or during World War II when Finland and Germany were allies, and consequently, the experience of the war is present in various ways in the memories of the past.

In the sparse imagery of Suomalaiset.de, it is nature that seems to capture the essence of the nation. At the top center of the site there is a collage of two images (fig. 6): The left-hand image depicts a view of a lake during the summer. The lake, the small rowboat, and the birch trees are all symbols of Finnish cultural heritage commonly found in films, literature, popular music, and advertisements. The other image, on the right, presents what seems to be a celebration of Oktoberfest, a stereotypical and easily identified symbol of Germany. Thus the collage conveys the transnational nature of the site as both Finnish (peaceful nature) and German (cheerful traditional sociability). It is however, illustrative, that the only map on the forum is a roadmap of Germany, presumably intended to help members find their way in a new home country.

Figure 6: An appeal to Suomalaiset.de's twofold audience—Finnish (left) and German (right). Source: …

The website includes discussions in Finnish on a wide range of practical issues, advice, and links for people arriving from other countries. In these discussions, notions of Finnishness are discussed in various ways. They are apparent in brief remarks on everyday matters such as traffic, food products, daycare, and taxation. Notions of national identity are present in the ways in which members share their experiences and memories of Finland.

Just as on the Kurdmania site, memories are not denotatively presented, but embedded in discussions and shared through everyday experiences. However, the forum includes a separate discussion thread focused on Finnish-German history. These discussions of history bring out contested views on Finland's relations with Germany during the World War II and on the ways in which that alliance has been discussed in public, such as the role of women who left Finland with German soldiers, and Finnish soldiers' treatment of prisoners.[7] The forum participants mention a recent documentary by Finnish director Virpi Suutari, "Auf Wiedersehn Finnland," which tells the story of Kaisu Lehtimäki and other women who left Finland with the German troops in 1944, as an example of a new perspective on the issue that had previously been mentioned only in the 1962 film "Pojat" with a more judgmental view toward the women's actions. In response to the documentary, another member of the website added a link to research done by a Finnish woman, Irja Wendisch, currently living in

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[7] http://www.suomalaiset.de/forum/showthread.php?t=9322

Berlin, on the secret children of the German soldiers in Finland.[8] Wendisch herself has a brother whose father was a German soldier. In her text, circulated on the discussion forum, Wendisch points out how the official history underscores the antipathy and hostility Finns and Germans felt for each other at the end of the war and omits the everyday interaction and shared friendships that also took place in wartime Finland. Yet, another member included a link to a series of photographs published by Pekka Jaatinen on the presence of German soldiers in Lapland (fig. 7).

Figure 7: Pekka Jaatinen's photographs of German soldiers in Lapland.
Source: http://personal.inet.fi/koti/pekka.jaatinen/galler1.html

These examples illustrate new interpretations of the past have accumulated in recent years. These interpretations are not limited to online media. Indeed, most of these historical narratives first appeared in mainstream media, although they find particular interpretative communities online where alternative views are discussed.

The history forum on the Suomalaiset website includes another thread on the activities of the Finnish army during the war. One member provides a link to a news report on new evidence of the harsh conditions in Finnish prisoner-of-war camps during the war. [9] Finnish activities are scrutinized, compared and contrasted with examples from the Soviet Union and Norway, and some discussants accuse others, mostly the Soviet Union for even worse actions. However, the discussion provides an alternative view to interpretations of Finland as the innocent victim of unfair attacks by the Soviet Union, thus illustrating the political dimensions of writing history. These discussions essentially travel back in time to patch the official or dominant narratives of Finnish war history and relations between Finland and Germany. Even if the discussions on the forum are not extensive and elaborate but rather brief and sporadic, they illustrate the particular flexibility of diasporic online forums. Historical events that have been considered a taboo in Finland are discussed perhaps with more ease in a context of migration that offers more distance from Finnish culture. Moreover, the online media allow members to take part in discussions anonymously and across distances, thereby offering a space where one can voice opinions that might otherwise be difficult to express.

The experience of migration also calls into question the boundaries of nationhood and provides a new perspective on the construction of citizenship as something specific and fixed. Moreover, the context of Germany, with its own difficult past and discussions that have arisen from its background, seem to affect the ways in which Finnish-German members of the forum reflect memories of the war. It is perhaps no

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[8] http://www.saksalaistensotilaidenlapset.com/
[9] http://www.suomalaiset.de/forum/showthread.php?t=8827

surprise, then, that members of the forum appear to be interested in the silenced, contested and personal accounts of the histories of these two nations. This is the way in which the context of migration shapes virtual participation and memory work. The combination of migrant community and memory work reflect Creet's description of the movement of memory: the manner in which memory travels is a quality of memory itself, constantly on the move, archiving itself rhizomatically (6). The mediated voices, images and sounds of the past cut across traditional territorial boundaries and nationally bounded media spaces. In this way, the transnational dimension of online memory work points further to new kinds of imaginative spaces and the capacity to function and think across nationally bound domains (Robins and Aksoy 14).

When memory work becomes transnational, as in the case of Suomalaiset.de, it leaves the centrality of nation states and their institutions to build on more diverse, contested and discontingouos spaces of remembering. Indeed, Canefe argues that remembering in diaspora is a fragmented form of commemoration that exceeds the nationally bound forms and understandings of memory work (170). Transnational online sites, combining diasporic and digital memories, seem to open up constellations of contextualized remembering that place emphasis on that which is situated and partial, rather than original and authentic.

Conclusions: Implications for Memory Work

Participatory online communication seems to enhance memory work as fluid, processual and on-going. As accounts and narratives of the past on websites are continuously added to and complemented from various sources, the notion of authentic or completed memory is challenged. The voices on these sites, mostly personal and individual, may complement or work against the fixity of officially documented history by providing private accounts of family histories, personal experiences, and individual, grassroots views on historical events. The open style of online communities offers an alternative to the authoritative production of memories by educators, cultural institutions, and mainstream media. As publicly accessible sites, online communities draw attention to experiences that may otherwise be marginalized from the official memory, or in Assmann's terms, from the cultural memory, that is constructed through history books, documentaries, museums and archives. At the same time, however, media reports and officially documented histories serve as constant reference points for individual accounts of the past, illustrating the on-going intertwined dynamics between cultural and communicative memory.

As public sites, they make individual memories available to the wider public and demonstrate the political dimensions of expanding memory beyond individual experience: other people remember, too. Memory work is also political, and there are various interests at play. Some voice particular interpretations of the past more loudly and more determinedly than others. Thus, communicative memory is not without conflicts and hierarchies.

I would argue then that the space of online memories is individualized, contradictory, and contested. Although online forums create a sense of community and reinforce shared meaning through images and narratives about the past, the discussions reveal the disparate, sometimes contradictory views that are circulated and expressed. Even though the sites may be built on a strong sense of shared identity, the open access to discussions and the unlimited possibilities for participation further

anti-essentialist elements of the online community. So while these spaces operate to re-affirm ethnic and cultural identities, they do that in an open and pluralistic space. In these digital spaces, dominant narratives of identities and migration history are both re-circulated and challenged. Alongside nostalgic imagery of the past, one may observe expressions of hybridity and a transnational sense of belonging. This contradiction exemplifies the struggle over meanings and memories, calling into question the construction of public memory as singular.

The Internet not only opens historical narratives up to a broader, potentially global audience, but even more significantly makes it possible for anyone to engage in the act of remembering in public. Indeed, much of the memory work that takes place in the context of online communities is embedded within mundane and ordinary daily interaction with others. The ordinariness of online memory work signals a move away from the sacred and holy past toward a more open, banal and ever-evolving past that may never be completed—the communicative memory of the everyday, embodying the routines and the rituals of the familiar. As in Massey's discussion of place as progressive (146–156), the past can be viewed as progressive, open, and inclusive. Such construction of the past does not rely on a singular and exclusive interpretation of history, but allows for contradictions and differences. Most of all, it renders the struggle over the interpretations of the past visible and open for many to judge, evaluate and participate in.

Acknowledgements

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