

In her thesis paper Hysniyya studies the collective memory and identity of women who have experienced the transition from communism to capitalism in Azerbaijan. Using oral history, Husniyya carried out a qualitative study which set out to uncover how these women remember and view two extremely distinct periods of their nation, and how these memories shape their identities. According to the study, these women's collective memory is characterized by a strong sense of nostalgia towards the communist era, but also a certain trauma they experienced, especially during the transition from one regime to the other.

Husniyya researches a largely understudied area: although collective memory, nostalgia, collective trauma, and post-communist societies are quite popular fields of study, Azerbaijani women are almost invisible in academic studies. But in spite of the lack of previous research to rely on, Husniyya does a remarkable job mapping this uncharted field and contextualizing it in academic discourse. The paper reveals both the similarities and the differences between other types of collective nostalgia, such as the ostalgie depicted by Daphne Berdahl, and also connects it to Jeffrey C. Alexander's work on collective trauma. In addition, the paper is written in a fluent and coherent style, avoiding the pseudo-technocratic yet poetically obscure language memory studies are so often drenched in.

Following are several issues, which hopefully could be expanded or corrected in the pursuing research Husniyya proposes to carry out.

1. From the formal point of view, some citations are unnecessary and misleading. The reference to Benedict Anderson on page 14, for example, is redundant, not only because the argument does not contribute to the topic, but also because Anderson doesn't discuss "imagined identities", but "imagined communities". The same goes for the Coser reference on the same page, which could actually be seriously developed, but is left hanging.
2. On pages 29-31 there are very good examples of nostalgia. The ones pertaining to sensuality – food and smells – are especially interesting, and could be developed in memory studies in general.
3. With connection to the above, one question that deserves further elaboration is, what differentiates Azerbaijani women's nostalgia from other collectives? Aside from the obvious regime change, it seems that vivid memories of a more sensual past ("the simple pleasures of life") and "more righteous people", are staples of nostalgia. This observation

could be made clearer by comparing Azerbaijani nostalgia with that of other post-socialist groups, as well as with groups that did not experience such a strong change in lifestyle.

4. The observation about tea houses (p. 53) is very good. Such research as suggested already exists, to an extent, for example Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* which discusses the contribution of coffee houses to the development of the public sphere and civil society. It would be interesting, however, to compare western coffee houses and Islamic tea houses as loci of social and political interaction.
5. The reference to Assmann on page 55 is good, but there is a mistake in terminology: negligence and dementia are actually *passive forgetting*. "Destruction of sites of memory": that is actual *active forgetting*.
6. While the discussion of collective nostalgia is excellent, the "collective trauma" section is less convincing. Although the women describe some darker memories, they don't necessarily count as "traumatic". What is lacking is a more rigorous definition of "collective trauma" and how such bleaker memories are indeed traumatic.
7. Finally, a very interesting connection is made between the memories of the respondents and their current fear of criticizing the regime. This point deserves further development in the future.

In conclusion, Husniyya's paper offers an original and interesting contribution to memory studies, by expanding it to a social group that is underrepresented in research. It is well formulated and based on strong literary and methodological foundations. I look forward to seeing Husniyya develop her topic in the future.

Grade: 1

Questions:

1. With reference to the 3rd comment above: what would you say differentiates Azerbaijani women's "sensual" nostalgia (tastier food, stronger smells, better people) from that of other social groups?
2. Returning to the 6th comment above, would you necessarily define the non-nostalgic memory of the respondents as traumatic? If so, why?