

The Memory of a Good Coffee

Cultures of Memory / Memories of Culture

Editor Stephanos Stephanides

University of Nicosia Press, (Cyprus, 2007) xii + 355 pp.

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Coffee House Embellishments

Nicos Philippou

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The recently renamed University of Nicosia Press has two splendid titles to celebrate its naming. In **Cultures of Memory** edited by Stephanos Stephanides there is an eclectic collection of prose and poetry which brings to life the woes and ecstasies of separation and union, memories and hopes. The blend of academic treatments from a wide range of backgrounds and nationalities produces a set of diverse yet coherent readings whose strength is in their bipartisan realisation of loss and humanity.

Stephanides does a very good job of bringing together stories, analysis and hope which for me were grounded in optimism in the change, surprise and disappointment that the world offers us all. The book opens with the temporal riddle of Stephanides own chapter; Nostalgia for the Future and offers us the possibility of finding ourselves not in the narrative of fact and fiction of lies and counter-accusations but in poetry where the unspoken has a power of its own. This chapter is the cornerstone for the rest of the book and shines upon the other chapters in rays of possibilities for our being which are all too often allowed to be homogenised in seeking tranquillity.

Building on this chapter, the book expands its scope into a discussion on law, politics, poetics, identity and place. In so doing its appeal widens to engage a multi-disciplinary audience. Although there are many excellent contributions, two stood out for me. The first was John Nassari's Post Memory Blues where he discusses postmemory, the experience of those who have grown up burdened by stories of past traumatic events. This biographical analysis of nostalgia and exilic identity of a Cypriot evokes strong images of despair, longing and reconstituted historical dialectic. Nassari's well researched and compelling paper concludes by warning

about the appropriation of the term postmemory and so offers a simple and ready-made frame for discussion, exploration and resolution.

My second selected paper shares the same scholarly attention as Nassari's. Giuseppe Martella's contribution is a chapter entitled *Dislocations of Memory: (Post)modern Narrative*. This is an insightful investigation of the nature of technological existence and its enframing of our cultural memory. Using Georg Sebal's *The Emigrants*, Martella illustrates dislocation of our memory of our authentic being by replacement and reproduction of a consumerist fetishist ideal of existence. The selection of just these two papers comes from my own curiosity and is no reflection on the quality of the other papers. This book is equally good as a concerted read or for pick-and-mixing as the topics appeal.

This book is worth a place in the bookshelves of academics and non-academics alike, for it offers an insight into the surveillance of our society by others while looking back in the mirror of the future.

What a treat the second book, **Coffee House Embellishments** by Nicos Philippou, was. This insightful collection of images from the coffee shops lacks pretension and has charm a-plenty. Philippou's narrative and visual discourse is enlightening. He brings us into the kafeneion by way of the accounts of those who have witnessed the emergence of the political, social and economic changes of Cyprus, which reveal much of what is unspokenly known to Cypriots but hidden to many foreigners. Philippou's introduction is more interesting than scholarly and is of more value for that. His odyssey through the kafeneia and his commentary on their political alignments, their central cultural role and their historical social exclusions creates an expectation of the photographs to follow. This expectation is more than met.

The candidness of the photographs is never intrusive but the images are revealing of a culture of divergent ideologies sitting happily in their potential contradiction. Images of saints sit alongside Baghdadis, Ché and local football teams. Sports trophies find a space among the vodka and whisky bottles and visible electric wires act as veins to the television and the radio. Local heroes of the past share pride of place with the iconic images of communism and the church. The impression is of places where people dwell, not of the artificial neatness of the hotel room or government office, but reflecting the functionality of their communities.

This book is a treasure and one that the Tourist Board of Cyprus would do well to have translated and given to all tourists visiting this country. My much-thumbed copies are always positioned in our guest bedroom and in my local syllogos. A book well worth reading, viewing and reflecting upon.

Paul Gibbs