Memory and periphery: An introduction[1]

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This special issue addresses the possible connections and mutual benefits of examining together two analytic concepts: memory and periphery. These concepts receive much attention in various scholarly discussions, yet they have done so rather independently from each other. The potential applications and utilities of combining memory and periphery will hopefully become apparent in this introduction, as well as in the contributions to this issue. But before turning to definitions and research questions, let us first take a look at a recent film production, which illustrates a few of the possible perspectives that connecting memory and periphery may yield.

   The film in question is *The Katzman Tapes* (2013), a pseudo documentary (or mockumentary) directed and written by Amnon Winner. The film's website states that it

> tells, with an ironic and satirical tone, but with a totally serious façade, the story of the state of Israel and Zionism, while tracing the elusive account of Shmuel Katzman's figure and its undocumented influence on the processes of history (http://thekatzmantapes.wix.com/katzman, accessed November 2014).

Although Katzman is a fictional character (a kind of Israeli Forrest Gump), *The Katzman Tapes* places him at the center of historical events and raises a variety of very real concerns regarding the state of Zionist ideology and its role in shaping Israeli society. The film does so in a series of interviews with various experts and public figures and portrays the director's journeys to different places around the globe in order to follow the story of this lost father figure.

   If we consider this film in relation to questions of memory,[2] we could point to at least four different aspects of "peripheriality." First, in portraying a fictional character as a central actor behind the scenes of Israeli history, the film can be said to shift and redefine the terms of this history. It thus offers alternatives to Zionist narratives of the State's past, exposes it to criticism and presents some of its ridiculous facets from unexpected angles. Second, while *The Katzman Tapes* focuses on the State of Israel, the director's point of view constantly takes the

viewers to other countries and continents to reflect on Israel's past and present. The places chosen (e.g., a small Japanese town, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Amsterdam, New York) and the pictures the director takes there stretch and challenge the familiar topography of Zionist narratives. This becomes most obvious when the director/narrator asks what should be the first station in Katzman's story and explicitly rejects starting in Degania (the first kibbutz), where allegedly all Zionist narratives begin. He chooses instead his protagonist's Polish hometown, but as a substitute to visiting Poland, the director imagines it through pictures of Japanese woods, thus positioning the conventional movement from the Ashkenazi diaspora to the land of Israel within an unusual transnational perspective. The third peripheral aspect refers to violence, an integral part of the Israeli reality, which in the film appears only on the margins of the plot. In the first half of *The Katzman Tapes*, we encounter a disconnection between the topics expressed in the figures' dialogues (discussing history, but also everyday concerns) and the camera's short glances at the headlines of newspapers that report the death of Israelis in terror attacks. By incorporating these headlines, the director adds, without really diverting from his search for Katzman, a sense of the existential fear of Jews, which is complemented by his recurring references to European antisemitism. Finally, the film omits any reference to Palestinians, thus endorsing their social marginalization and "erasure" from Israel's history (Piterberg, 2010). By not incorporating any Palestinian voices and experiences, the film adopts the Zionist story of brave Jewish pioneers who came to "redeem" an empty land and who themselves were victims of violence for which they were not to be blamed.[3]

The Katzman Tapes thus presents a few ways through which peripheral views can challenge, enrich, divert, stretch, reevaluate, support and ignore narratives that address and shape memory. By considering the relevance of "periphery" (however defined and used) to the study of memory, this special issue hopes to add a fresh interpretative and methodological framework to the field of memory studies. It wishes to do so by making explicit the memory–periphery link in existing scholarship and offering new directions for exploring the insights entailed in this link in pieces written specifically for this purpose. The questions that guide us throughout this special issue are: What is the role of peripheral perspectives in a research field that seems to still focus on the alleged "center" of society and on collective, cultural or social memory as representing the elusive notion of a "majority"? Which aspects or objects of remembering can be considered "peripheral"? What constitutes their peripheriality? What are the functions of seemingly "marginal" elements in the exchanges that characterize and constitute mnemonic practices and products? Does it make sense to speak about remembrance/memory in spatial terms, and are there any alternatives to such conceptualizations?

The special issue is divided into three parts. The introduction will sketch the terms of our discussion and point to various possible directions in examining the memory of periphery and the periphery of memory. The five articles that follow go in depth into diverse specific constellations of the topic from different disciplines. The final part presents eleven short reflections on memory and periphery by scholars who have dealt with these concepts from a variety of standpoints. The multiplicity of outlooks, disciplinary approaches and perceptions that the contributions to this special issue present are inherent to the subject matter, which crosses themes, places and periods. These differences were intentionally sought in order to trace as many meanings and uses as possible, and they definitely cannot be considered comprehensive. In spite of the dissimilarities, practically all of the contributions to this special issue pursue a basic understanding of periphery as constituting a less visible, neglected and remote factor (of various sorts) that, precisely because of its marginality (however conceived), provides and enables an unusual perspective that could serve to challenge and enrich preconceived analytic notions as well as raise political and ethical issues.

Center and periphery

Let us first review common definitions and usages of "periphery" in relation to its (at least implied) counterpart, "center," and consider periphery's epistemic potential. Generally speaking, the contrast of center with periphery is employed as an organizing tool based on the relation of isolated points (center) to the surface that surrounds them (periphery). This depiction assigns certain remoteness to two (or more) objects, topics, places, opinions and the like that share (or are subsumed under) the same general frame. Centers serve as focal points because they stand high in an order of symbols, values, beliefs or power and often also due to considerations of physical location. In its extreme form, center–periphery assumes a contrast that is "stable enough indeed to stand for the geographic distance between two zones. It constitutes a two-dimensional mapping—a mapping without perspectival illusions, deceptions or ambiguities" (Gumbrecht, 1997:272).

Nevertheless, the dividing lines between centers and peripheries are often blurred. Their respective locations are *felt* and cannot be pinpointed and articulated in a manner that all could agree on.[4] Scholars have pointed out that, even in modern societies, where states implement centralizing measures and aspire to totality, the interplay between center and periphery is fraught with contradictions and inconsistencies (Lefebvre, 1991:331–334). They describe the susceptibility of centers to various degrees of movability and question their solidity and durability. Instead of clear distinctions in a two-dimensional mapping, scholars are increasingly speaking of

in-between areas and examining encounters, connections and frictions (Tsing, 2005) in frontiers, boundaries, borders (Diener and Hagen, 2010; Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013), edges (Casey, 2011) and alternative spaces (Megill, 2009). They turn their attention to mobility and movement rather than settle for stable locations and static categories (Andolph and Avrutin, 2012; Sternhell, 2012).

The center–periphery scheme seems to serve nowadays primarily as a target for criticism and deconstruction. The clear distinction between the two elements of this analytical duo is relativized and used to introduce liminal and multidimensional notions, which account for the increasing "deterritorializations of people, matter, culture, art, etc." (Ramadan, 2007:143; see also Ghosh-Schellhorn and Alexander, 2006). In its function as a scholarly punching bag, center–periphery continues to play an important role in questioning the use of binary categories and reconsidering issues of social justice, power and the production of knowledge. Post-colonial and feminist critics have especially depicted "the margins" as sites imbued with transgressive capacity that could destabilize and transform the respective center by shifting "marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures [to] marginality one chooses as a site of resistance" (hooks, 1990:153). According to some variants of this view, "marginalized subjects have an epistemic advantage, a particular perspective that scholars should consider, if not adopt, when crafting a normative vision of a just society" (Nash, 2008:3).

This view is not without its methodological traps.[5] Nevertheless, the epistemic potential of peripheral perspectives should not be doubted. Scholarly attention to peripheries (with or without explicit reference to a clear center or core) provides uncommon and thought-provoking insights that could help revamp existing research interests. The examples for that are indeed telling (Chakrabarty, 2000; Diner, 2008; Peltonen, 2001). But since centers and peripheries are not static and the terms and objects of marginalization are case-specific and mutable, we must be able to shift our attention accordingly rather than blindly adopt preconceived notions and predictable academic practices. A flexible attitude that pays attention to changes and transformations could counter stagnation and overt conventionalization and yield innovative analytic perspectives. The remainder of this introduction examines some of these perspectives.

Memories of the marginalized

A common approach to the memory of periphery seeks alternative and local accounts of marginal subjects and appreciates their particular perceptions and experiences. This approach frequently follows a democratic impulse that aims to "redeem" underprivileged groups, diminish their (physical or other) distance from their

respective centers,[6] and provide them with social recognition. Many scholars speak accordingly of people's "right to memory" (Lee and Thomas, 2012; Reading, 2014) as an important element of social justice, due to the role memory plays in establishing collective identities and because of the connection between contemporary inequality and past discrimination.[7]

A commonly used concept that addresses the power relations implicated in marginalized memory is *silencing*. The term stresses social actors' active efforts to exclude certain people and stories from collective depictions of the past. Silencing "deals with the many ways in which the production of historical narratives involves the uneven contribution of competing groups and individuals who have unequal access to the means of such production" (Trouillot, 1995:xix). In order to break the silences that constitute and support oppression and inequality,[8] the subaltern is given an opportunity to speak. Oral history is thus used to "clamor against the crime of silence" (Lim, 2014:6), for instance, when interviewing witnesses to the events that took place in Tiananmen Square in 1989, which the Chinese regime is trying to obscure.

As three contributions to this issue (by Red Chidgey, Safa Aburabia and Shmulik Lederman) demonstrate, however, a one-dimensional depiction of silencer vs. silenced (or the periphery's resistance against the center's oppression) might miss the multiple factors that participate in the marginalization of minorities' memories, the specific forms these memories assume and the functions that they serve in the peripheries. Furthermore, since a certain degree of "forgetting" is imperative for the construction of a positive sense of self, some minorities' commemorative initiatives choose not to display the more painful parts of their past. By performing a partial self-silencing, minorities can both advance communal identification based on optimistic values (rather than on memories of hatred and violence) and attempt to appeal to the majority population (Wagenhofer, 2013). In order to make political and social aspirations relatable and publicly effective, some minorities' initiatives prefer to focus on single events, stories or persons to deliver their message, although in this way they neglect referring to some of the group's experiences and voices (Armstrong and Crage, 2006; Schwartz, 2009). This means that positive (empowering) forgetting and negative (repressive) forgetting may coexist and that their combination could become instrumental in attaining social equality or reaching reconciliation between former foes (Barkan, 2000; Misztal, 2010). We should also remember that silences have different meanings and causes (Greenspan, 2014) and might express particular cultural practices rather than be a product of oppression (Kidron, 2012). Moreover, although "silence is often tightly coupled with forgetting and talk with memory…silence can also be used to facilitate

recollection, while talk can be used to enhance amnesia" (Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger, 2010:1104; see also Connerton, 2008). Such considerations establish the need to address the memory of periphery as part of a complex set of factors that go beyond a crude power struggle where the center is identified with silencing/forgetting and periphery with remembrance.

Formation, transformation

The study of memory and periphery does not, however, apply solely to questions of social recognition. A number of reflection pieces in this issue point out the role of mnemonic processes in the formation and transformation of peripheries. Peter Carrier offers a new reading of the social history of Leicester that traces the role of memory and gossip in the creation of social peripheries as temporal entities. In so doing, he provides a fascinating illustration of the multidirectionality of the memory–periphery link. Lea David discusses how the foundation of the European Union and the collapse of the Communist regimes established a new memory periphery in Europe. While the EU pushes for the production of shared attitudes in terms of European memory, it has in fact led to contradictory and competing narratives of the continent's pasts, a finding that illustrates that the post-Communist states draw on circles of meaning not limited to the European framework.

Daniel Levy argues that the growing attention of memory scholars to peripheral memories indicates that the marginal has moved center stage. In pointing to the shifting positions of scholarly views concerning the memories of center and periphery, his piece could be used to ponder on whether the "centralization" of mnemonic peripheries also means the "peripheralization" of the respective centers. Henry Greenspan reveals a different kind of shift regarding what comprises the central and the marginal in interviews with a Holocaust survivor. He demonstrates how conducting multiple interviews with the same person uncovers various and malleable versions of one's past and varying ways of framing it, thus reminding us we should not accept a particular narrative constellation as the sole and "true" one.

In other contexts, scholars have observed the "wandering" of peripheries and the role of memory in their altered constitution. Herman Lebovics has shown how France's decolonization in the 1960s caused the French government to announce a series of steps that practically redefined the rural regions of the country as the new colonies. In an intriguing "reenactment" of the anti-colonial struggle, the government employed methods and experts from the former colonies, and the regional resisters emulated the symbols and methods of Third World freedom fighters (Lebovics, 2004).

Broader views

Additional perspectives on the memory of periphery urge scholars to widen their gaze and not to remain fixed on the "usual suspects" of memory research.[9] Thus a recent collection of articles entitled *Peripheral Memories* defines itself as a turn away from the prevalent preoccupations with "national memory cultures" and collective experiences of violence to everyday social interactions (Boesen et al., 2012). Other studies challenge the tendency to focus on capital cities when writing national histories and integrate alternative memory centers into their analyses. Thus, Guy Beiner's investigation (in this volume) of peripheral memory in Ireland shows that, since Dublin did not always constitute the main and only arena of historical occurrences, places on the Irish periphery assumed a central significance in depictions of certain pasts. Rather than present a single pattern of center–periphery relations, Beiner identifies three modes of memory through which the periphery can assert itself.

Two contributions to this issue show how expanding the view on memory and periphery can take place on very different scales. John Sutton examines the interplay of two perspectives in autobiographical memory: one in which a person recalls personal experiences as if looking through her own eyes at the time, and the other in which one occupies the standpoint of an external observer. Sutton argues that, while scholars often privilege the former, "central" perspective, "'peripheral' modes of access to the past can also form rich and transformative parts of memory experience." In stark contrast to this close look at memory at the individual level, Ewa Domanska ponders how periphery and memory would be conceived as part of recent scholarly discussions that explore human life within a geological view of Earth's history, a view that stretches and rethinks common notions of time, space and community.

The growing tendency of late to expand the perspective on memory articulates itself primarily by placing it within global, transnational and transcultural frameworks. Rather than simply enlarge the examined objects of study (a move that might lead to the application of unsuitable concepts),[10] these studies demonstrate the continuous and multifaceted mobility, mediation and multidirectionality of memory (Bond and Rapson, 2014; Levy and Sznaider, 2006; Rothberg, 2009). That is, they approach memory as a form of mediated action, which is not confined to certain "sites," but rather is constituted through constant movements and interactions. Memories thus emerge from multiple places and are involved in interplay between different pasts and a heterogeneous present. Furthermore, the

> focus on worldwide mnemonic processes…invites the question of how, from non-Western perspectives, we might challenge and consider our categories, "provincialize cultural memory,"[11] as it were, and conceive of memory in its multiplicity and discrepancy (Erll, 2011:16).

Astrid Erll's and Zhuang Wei's reflection piece traces these questions in relation to the memory of the Jewish exile in Shanghai during the Holocaust. In observing the double peripheriality of this topic (both regarding its geographic location and its absence in common accounts of the Holocaust) and its rising centrality and mobility in recent years, they help foster a discussion on the possible meanings and features of periphery in relation to globalizing memory.

Looking *at* diasporas and *from* diasporas constitutes important contemporary ways of reconsidering and provincializing common approaches to memory and identity, which are still largely associated with the nation-state. Recent studies point to the important role of diasporic communities in the emergence of nationalism (O'Donnell, Bridenthal and Reagin, 2005) and some have even suggested that nowadays, due to the increasing numbers of immigrants and the pressures of global media, "whole nations are becoming diasporic in relation to their past" (Huyssen, 2003:151). When a diaspora and "its" nation-state seem to spill into each other, this raises queries regarding the boundaries of memory and the possible centers it has (Wulf, 2009). In her article in this issue, Amy Garey tackles a particularly complex case when exploring nostalgia in festivals of Soviet-era songs that take place in the United States. Garey asks whose memories are being performed there and what kind of communal sentiments are expressed on this periphery of the Soviet imagined community, which no longer has a center. In this sense, she writes, people go to these campouts, "at least in part, in search of a Soviet phantom."

Pilgrimage to the past

Peripheries must not necessarily constitute places of resistance, competition, divergence and ambiguity in relation to the memory produced by national centers. In various ways, peripheral locations actually contribute to the formation of political centers and their versions of the past. While the proximity of people to monuments and memorials plays an important role in making present certain versions of memory, travelling to distant places of higher value and meaning could endow people with a different commemorative gain. This can be seen, for instance, in the longstanding ritual significance that Israeli Zionists assigned to climbing the ancient fortress Masada, above the Dead Sea, in order to celebrate it as a symbol of Jewish strength. The "anchoring of this event in an exciting geographical location opened the opportunity to add alternative means of relating to the historical event, combining a patriotic lesson with an adventure" (Zerubavel, 1995:120). We find similar, yet less adventurous, trips to sites of mass death in the case of the annual ceremonies that the East German government held at the Buchenwald memorial. In these ceremonies, state officials styled themselves as continuing the legacy of the anti-fascist resistance

and then "carried" their heroic aura with them back to the political center in Berlin (Knigge, 1998). Scholars have often conceived of these journeys to historical sites of violence (Mosse, 1990) or to graves of national leaders (Feige and Ohana, 2012) as modern pilgrimages. A number of memory scholars employ Victor Turner's depiction of pilgrims as people who leave their home and embark on a journey to a sacred periphery, which transiently becomes a sacred center. The individual thereby potentially experiences a feeling of social bond (*communitas*) and returns home transformed. In some cases, these pilgrimages are individuals' returns to places they used to live in, as in the case of Palestinian refugees visiting (on their own or with family) the village or city they had to leave (Abu-Lughod, 2007; Ben-Ze'ev, 2011:103–109). In other cases, these are trips organized by public bodies with a pedagogical agenda that advances a specific interpretation of the past (Feldman, 2008).

The notion of traveling outside of the familiar and everyday in order to somehow gain "access" to the past could also be applied to a number of activities associated with remembering. This takes place on a most basic level in historical tourism, where visitors "take" the experience with them through various souvenirs, stories and pictures or "give" something of their own, leaving a trace that connects them to the historical place (Sather-Wagstaff, 2011). Similarly, historical reenactments and interactive exhibitions in museums (such as "The Trench" at the Imperial War Museum, London) offer people a way to participate in events they have "missed" (Amster, 2007). People's efforts to experience what they did not go through themselves appear in Gary Weissman's study of non-witnesses who attempt to capture the horror of the Holocaust by reading survivors' accounts and visiting authentic sites of the genocide (Weissman, 2004). Other studies portray how the children of victims of mass violence "remember" instances of their parents' experiences (Chaitin and Steinberg, 2014) and how personal memories integrate images and episodes taken from a variety of media (Hirsch, 2001; Landsberg, 2004; Roseman, 1998).

The notion of going "outside oneself" in constructing one's memory can also be used to inquire as to what belongs to the self and what the self belongs to. In her article in this volume, Julia Creet contemplates what it means to be peripheral to the past. She does so in relation to her recent discovery of the Holocaust experiences of her late mother, who had told her daughter neither what she went through nor about her Jewishness. "How does one remember something that was latently but manifestly not one's own?"

Memory at the margins

This final section considers references to the past that appear at the margins of various depictions or are otherwise characterized by a limited visibility. The issue

of relative or absolute invisibility is regularly raised in approaching questions of social marginalization (Brighenti, 2010:46–47) and as part of attempts to give people whose experiences went thus far "unnoticed" an equal and "visible" place in society (Beltrán, 2009; Moore, 2011). When applied to a discussion of memory, invisibility corresponds with silencing a certain group's experiences within hegemonic narratives. Yet this invisibility is often not complete. By examining peripheral details that appear in depictions from varied media, we sometimes discover that they act as hints that invite us to reflect on alternative, and even subversive, memories that may break these very silences.

The articles by Anke Pinkert and Zuzanna Dziuban in this volume offer two different illustrations of this point. Pinkert presents a close analysis of an East German film (*Carbide and Sorrel*, 1963), which describes one man's journey in the aftermath of WWII and exposes, on the way, a number of images concerning the war and the immediate postwar period. She points to the existence of traces of certain aspects of that past, which the East German regime silenced in official accounts, on the margins of the film's visual field. While these aspects are constantly alluded to, they

> have marginal impact—if at all—on the story. On the other hand, this meandering, accidental narration allows the reintroduction of topics that have become semi-taboo in the national memory discourse of the postwar period, including most notably the trope of sexual violence.

Pinkert stresses that these barely noticeable, fleeting moments in the film become meaningful only when the viewer decides to focus on them and accept them as enticements for the acknowledgment of unpopular themes regarding historical trauma.[12]

Dziuban's article discusses quite a different articulation of the past's marginal visibility, embodied in the figure of the ghost, which nevertheless presents a very similar potential for destabilizing hegemonic narratives and offering alternatives to them. She points to the dual application of figurative and non-figurative ghosts. On the one hand, as transitional figures, merging the visible and invisible, the living and the dead, ghosts refer to communities excluded from the social and political realm. On the other hand, the figure of the ghost "designates the moment of the past's sudden and uncanny interruption or disruption of the present" and voices resistance by addressing "the problem of misrepresentations and denial inscribed in official interpretations of the past." Dziuban's case study is an analysis of representations that report Poles being haunted by the forgotten Jewish residents of the Muranów district in Warsaw, the site of the Warsaw Ghetto, and how these ghosts introduce critical standpoints to debates on Polish-Jewish history.

A final word

The variety of studies and viewpoints surveyed in this introduction testify to the heuristic potential of combining "memory" and "periphery." I have shown, on the one hand, the transgressive capacity of peripheral perspectives to blur boundaries, break silences, destabilize centers and question common analytic categories in the study of memory. On the other hand, I have discussed some aspects of peripherality that contributed to the creation and validation of centers and their versions of the past.

As Gerd Sebald notes in his reflection piece, the combination of the temporal term "memory" with the spatial term "periphery" appears rather odd at first glance. Indeed, several scholars have recently criticized the still prevalent tendency to approach memory in starkly spatial terms, which often culminates in treating memory as a "thing" or a "container" (Erll, 2011; Kabalek, Forthcoming; Middleton and Brown, 2005; Olick, 2007:85–118). Yet as Sebald shows, and the contributions to this special issue illustrate, the spatialization of memory through peripheral perspectives can do something else. It can introduce new and unusual ways of viewing our relationship to the past, raise questions regarding the forms and functions of centers, and contemplate the unit of memory itself and its possible "margins."

NOTES

1 I would like to thank Reut Bendrihem, Zuzanna Dziuban, Mori Ram and Or Tshuva for their helpful comments on this text.

2 The film itself is not memory as such, but rather a product of mnemonic processes, while also offering certain perspectives for the discussion of specific pasts. On this point, see Radstone (2005).

3 The film's focus on Israelis/Jews as victims might also be a response to the recent tendency in several Israeli documentaries to discuss Israelis as perpetrators. See Morag (2013).

4 "It is the center, because it is the ultimate and irreducible; and it is felt to be such by many who cannot give explicit articulation to its centrality" (Shils, 1982:93).

5 The attempt to endorse peripheral and indigenous knowledge might lead scholars to reify difference, pursuing "authentic" and untouched cultural specificity while failing to account for "knowledge that travels and mobilizes" (Tsing, 2005:8; see also Huggan, 2001).

6 The question of whether to maintain a marginal position or to demand inclusion in

the mainstream is itself a matter of discussion among marginalized groups. See, for instance, Sturken (1997:184–185).

7   The significance of memory to the latter aspect is that it "highlights the subjective side of a history of discrimination, the meaning the past has for members of those groups who were the targets of discrimination and oppression" (Williams, 1998:463–464).

8   Nur Masalha (2012) speaks in this sense about "memorycide" of the *Nakba*.

9   Sidra Ezrahi (1996) thus argues that, by looking for the "peripheral places" of the Holocaust, i.e., not focusing on Auschwitz (which many scholars depict as the "center" or "black hole" that pulls all Holocaust references to it), one could reconstruct alternative histories of this event.

10   Nancy Fraser has warned against recklessly transferring the discussion of the public sphere, a notion that was conceived for the national context, to transnational frameworks (2009:76–99).

11   This is a reference to Chakrabarty (2000).

12   One should not, of course, assume that all cases of incorporating traces of silenced narratives on the margins aim at producing alternative depictions of the past. Danielle Schwartz's recent analysis of the Israeli film *Paratroopers* (dir. Judd Neeman, 1977) shows that the ruins of Palestinian buildings, which constitute the "background" or setting of the occurrences (but are never addressed explicitly), contribute to erasing the Palestinian experience and incorporate it into Zionist narratives (Schwartz, 2014).

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