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Media and Memory on the 6 February 2023 Earthquakes: The Case of Malatya

6 Şubat Depremlerinde Medya ve Bellek: Malatya Örneği

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Abstract

Media enterprises created an environment where it is possible to store and recall information outside of the human memory. As a result, we may view media enterprises as memory spaces. It is important to refer to the memory institutions and media workers' testimonies with their ability to function as tools that enable recall particularly in extraordinary times. One such case of extraordinary times in the scope of this study is the earthquakes that occurred on 6 February 2023, whose epicentre was the province of Kahramanmaraş, impacting eleven other provinces of Türkiye. We selected Malatya province as the main universe of the study as it was among the three most impacted provinces in the February 6th earthquakes. We chose to focus on ER TV as the sample because it was the television channel which broadcasted locally for about 30 years in Malatya province, and it was

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one of the most widely viewed television channels in the region. In this context, the study aims to understand the testimonies of the local media workers of the earthquake and to determine how the viewers affected both the process of the earthquake and the perception towards the post-earthquake stage. The main reason to select Malatya province as the main universe of this study is related to our methodology in this study. We opted to use the ethnographic interview method. We conducted interviews with four workers of the ER TV channel, a wellestablished media enterprise in Malatya. As the interviewers, our experiences and participants' testimonies allowed us to examine the reality of the earthquake from within. As a result of the interviews we conducted with the channel employees who had experienced the earthquake, we found the following: (1) The local television channels reported the degree of impact of the earthquake on the cities more in detail compared to the national television channels, (2) The channel workers were able to observe the events around them more from within as they were earthquake victims themselves, and for most of them, this was the city where they were born and raised, (3) The local media workers were more knowledgeable about the city streets, its structures, and history compared to those of the national media, (4) They could address the problems that the local public encountered more aptly, (5) They worked just like a social aid organisation and collected funds for those in need, (6) They could create agenda that would draw politicians' attention to the city with their news reports, and (7) They managed to keep the effects of the earthquake current by using the social media actively.

Keywords: earthquake, Malatya, media, memory, ethnographic interview

Öz

Medya kuruluşları, insan belleği dışında verilerin depolanabileceği ve ihtiyaç dahilinde hatırlanabileceği bir ortam oluşturmuştur. Bu sebeple de medya kuruluşlarını birer hafıza mekânı olarak değerlendirebiliriz. Özellikle olağanüstü dönemlerde medya kuruluşlarının hatırlamayı mümkün kılan birer araç niteliğinde olan arşivlerine ve çalışanlarının tanıklıklarına başvurmak önemlidir. Çalışma dahilinde söz konusu olağanüstü döneme ait örnek olay, Türkiye'nin 11 ilinin etkilenmiş olduğu Kahramanmaraş merkezli 6 Şubat 2023 tarihinde gerçekleşen depremlerdir. 6 Şubat depremlerinden en çok etkilenmiş ilk 3 il içinde yer alan Malatya ilini çalışmanın ana evreni, Malatya ilinde yaklaşık 30 yıldır yerel düzeyde yayın hayatına devam eden ve bölgenin en çok izlenen televizyon kanallarından biri olan ER TV'yi ise çalışmanın örneklemi olarak seçtik. Bu bağlamda çalışmanın amacı, yerel medya çalışanlarının depreme ilişkin tanıklıklarını anlamaya çalışmak ve seyircinin hem deprem sürecini hem de depremden sonraki süreci algılama asamasına nasıl etkide bulunduklarını tespit etmektir. Calısmanın ana evreni olarak Malatya ilini seçmemizin temel nedeni çalışmada tercih ettiğimiz yöntem ile doğrudan ilişkilidir. Çalışmada etnografik mülakat yöntemini tercih ettik ve Malatya'nın köklü medya kuruluşlarından biri olan ER TV kanalı çalışanlarından dört kişi ile mülakatlar gerçekleştirdik. Mülakatı gerçekleştiren

kişiler olarak bizlerin depreme yönelik tanıklıkları ve katılımcıların tanıklıkları deprem gerçeğine *içeriden* bakabilmemize olanak tanıdı. Depremin tanıkları olan kanal çalışanları ile gerçekleştirdiğimiz mülakatlar sonucunda: (1) yerel televizyon kanallarının ulusal televizyon kanallarına göre şehirlerin depremden etkilenme durumlarını daha ayrıntılı paylaştığını, (2) yerel televizyon kanalı çalışanlarının aynı zamanda birer depremzede olduğundan ve birçoğu doğup büyüdüğü şehirde görev yaptığından çevrelerinde yaşananlara daha *içten* bakabilme imkanına sahip olduklarını, (3) şehrin sokaklarına, yapılarına, tarihine ulusal medyaya göre daha hakim olduklarını,(4) halkın sorunları ile daha yakından ilgilenebildiklerini, (5) adeta bir sosyal yardımlaşma kurumu gibi çalıştıklarını ve ihtiyaç sahipleri için yardım topladıklarını, (6) siyasilerin dikkatini şehre çekecek haberler yapıp gündem oluşturabildiklerini, (7) sosyal medyayı aktif olarak kullanıp depremin tesirlerini güncel tutabildiklerini tespit ettik.

Anahtar sözcükler: deprem, Malatya, medya, hafiza, etnografik mülakat

Introduction

Interest in and the need for studies on the earthquakes of February 6, 2023, which affected eleven provinces in Türkiye, including analyses of the crises that emerged in the aftermath, have grown significantly. In fact, 93% of the Turkish land is in the earthquake zone, facing a risk of an earthquake. For this reason, data gathered from the field related to pre- and post-disaster periods are highly valuable. Our study presents data on the 6 February earthquakes and the recovery after the earthquake incidents because it is a fitting study for this purpose.

We conducted this study on four employees of ER TV, a television channel that operates locally in Malatya province, through ethnographic interviews. Our methodology was based on Jan Assmann's (2015) view that electronic culture can be the bearer of memory and Pierre Nora's (2006) idea of memory places. In this study, we considered ER TV as the memory space of Malatya province. The expressions and observations of the witnesses of the earthquake who were also the workers of the channel at the same time enabled us to determine the degree to which the media was effectively employed for perceiving and recalling the earthquake.

The basic aim of our study was to make visible the memories of the province of Malatya via ER TV workers' testimonies after the 6 February earthquakes. In this study, the concept of *memory of earthquakes* encompasses both the elements related to pre- and post-earthquake physical conditions, work conditions, and broadcast content of the media enterprise, as well as the contact of the media enterprise with the national press after the earthquake, such public institutions as AFAD (Short for "Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency" in Türkiye), city authorities and the public. These comprised the themes on which we focused in the interviews.

ER TV commenced broadcasting in 1994 at the local level through the satellite system as of 1 July 2015. Focusing on this channel allowed us to compare the circumstances of Malatya province before the earthquake and the developments that emerged after the earthquake because this media enterprise had been broadcasting issue about Malatya for about 30 years.

At the time of the study, the general broadcasting director of this channel was Mustafa Eren, and the responsible director was Burak Altun. Besides TÜRKSAT 4A satellite, the channel is available for viewing on such digital viewing platforms as Digiturk, ARTI Digital media and Blu TV as well as all smart ip televisions (ER TV, 2024a).

ER TV constantly updates its viewer ratings on its web site and creates exclusive news texts on these ratings. According to the news published on the official web site of the channel dated 1 February 2024, based on the Admongrel Analytics rating measurement system data, the number of ER TV's daily viewers reached a figure between 7.5-10 million, and following the 6 February earthquakes, the channel became the most viewed television channel in the earthquake region (ER TV, 2024b). In the news on this topic, the following statements highlight this:

ER TV is undertaking a social responsibility by taking on a role in the restoration of the city after the Kahramanmaraş earthquake sequence of M7.7 and M7.6 on 6 February by functioning not only as the citizen's voice but also as a bridge for the citizens by helping them keep up with the news of their hometown which they had to abandon, help understand the extent of the damage in Malatya more clearly, and help meet their needs and demands in the city through the constant and uninterrupted live broadcasts, programs, and news content from Malatya, which suffered great damage. (ER TV, 2024b)

We observed that the content of this news piece published on the channel's own web site is consistent with the channel's activities after the earthquake. For this reason, we decided that ER TV possessed the characteristics of a sufficient memory space where one could follow the traces of the memories stemming from the disaster experienced in Malatya province.

We conducted interviews with four individuals from ER TV, which we regarded as a memory space in the context of this study. The individuals that we included in the study had personally experienced the earthquakes on the 6 February and witnessed the events related to the disaster as they continued to broadcast news about the post-earthquake events. The reason that the number of interviewees in this study was only four individuals was due to the decline in the number of personnel employed in the channel following the earthquakes. As a result, we conducted interviews with the following individuals: (1) B.A. is both the responsible director and program director of the channel; (2) H.K. is the channel program producer and presenter; (3) Ü.G. is a presenter in the channel and an active worker in the field; and (4) E.K. is the news director of the channel. The first interviewee we contacted was H.K. When we mentioned the aim of our study, H.K believed in the study's potential to help spread the news about the damage that the earthquake caused in Malatya and make the work of the channel more visible, thus accepting to guide us to contact the other interviewees. We conducted four interview sessions with H.K. and the three other participants that we contacted through H.K. between 25 May 2024 and 25 September 2024. The location where we conducted the interviews was the container which was the participants' working space. Following the interviews, we deciphered the audio recordings and formed five categories that gave a direction to our study from their common statements. We determined the categories as, (1) the changes in the working conditions in the local media after the earthquake, (2) the

contacts that the local media established with the national media after the earthquake, (3) the broadcasts that local media made about the damage caused by the earthquake particularly in Malatya, (4) the contributions of the local media in crisis management after the earthquake, and (5) the changing broadcasting policies of the local media after the earthquake.

1. Methodology

In this study that we aimed towards understanding the 6 February earthquakes in Malatya with the focus on ER TV, we used the ethnographic interview method to benefit from the local media participants' testimonies and pre-/post-earthquake observations of the city more effectively.

We can define ethnographic interviews as "people's activities that we are trying to understand and the endeavour to make meaning out of the events that they are a part of" (Sevgi, 2024: 1134). This method encompasses gathering information about the past experiences of individuals by asking questions. The ethnographic interview, which aims to gain an understanding of the emotional experiences related to the contexts and activities (Canniford, 2005), is based on human experiences and the subject is the witness of history, which makes the method suitable for this study. Because this method is aligned with questions related to human memory and emotions, it is possible to collect information which is unrecorded in official sources. Usually, the actors of ethnographic interviews are ordinary people, thus making it possible for researchers to examine the situations *from within* through interviews conducted in natural environments.

In our study, the official sources present information about the number of citizens who lost their lives in earthquakes, the magnitude of the earthquakes, the provinces affected, and the numerical data of the collapsed buildings, while ethnographic interviews transcend these data as they are structured upon the events experienced and witnessed. These experiences are important for our country where earthquakes occur periodically and very often. Ethnographic interviews can bring to light disaster-related traumas and report the unfavourable circumstances caused by disasters in their true scale. In this respect, the ethnographic studies conducted on hurricane Katrina in the USA are worth mentioning. For instance, in the study called Cultural Trauma, Memory, and Gendered Collective Action: The Case of Women of the Storm following Hurricane Katrina, Emmanuel David (2008) stated that following the hurricane, many of the individuals in the country commented that the hurricane was no longer effective and that the locals survived the damage caused by the disaster, while an activist group called Women of the Storm functioned as the disaster's memory space and told the administrators and global media viewers about the facts about hurricanes. Owing to the work of this group, Women of the Storm, the authorities learned about the requests for assistance from the local public and the need to implement new policies towards hurricanes.

We see the ER TV as the memory space in our study just as *Women of the Storm* was in David's work. Through our ethnographic interviews, we observed that the reality of the earthquake was different from how it looked in the national media, just as in the hurricane Katrina incidents mentioned above. We were able to examine the events *from within* by

going beyond the stereotyped perceptions related to earthquakes. In this way, we aimed to contribute to the process of "reporting that place to the people who were not in that place" as emphasized by Figen Balamir (2023: 39).

In this first part of the paper, we examined the media concept as a memory space and discussed its role in shaping memory, recalling, and forgetting. In the second part of the paper, we dwelled upon the importance of the media and news reporting in meeting the communication needs at times of disasters as well as the contributions of the media in the disaster period. The last part of the paper presents the methodology of the study and ethnographic interviews conducted with four ER TV employees as the sample of our study.

2. Media as a memory space

Today mass communication is digital, and we transform data into digital codes, increasing the importance of memory by the day. In fact, recall is progressively difficult in the *speed era*. This difficulty entails other fears, making memory studies the centre of attention in a multidisciplinary field. As we approach the end of the 21st century, we turn our gaze frequently to the past to see and evaluate our position in the passage of time (Huyssen, 1999: 11). This turning back is a call to the memory, and thus a call to the past. In his work on cultural memory, Jan Assmann, whose ideas we used in our study, states that the hankering to and curiosity about the past emerge particularly in extraordinary times. Disasters that impact human history deeply and such events as crimes against humanity face the fate of fading from memory as the lifespan of the generation who witnessed these events first-hand ended. The reason is that loss entails losing the witnesses of the past at the same time (Assmann, 2015: 17–18). The fear of losing the past facilitated the rise in the interest towards the studies that function as agents of public memory and exploration of memory.

Besides Assmann, we should note the work of Pierre Nora being inspirational for our study. Nora stated that memory forms history, and thus, each memory space may dissolve the ambiguities of both the nations and memories (2006: 10). What Nora means by memory spaces goes beyond the boundaries of walls: sometimes an archive document, a monument, or the memory of a person can be memory spaces (2006: 9). We may use the term memory *reservoirs* to stand for the physical spaces that activate memory and contribute to recall (Gross, 2002). In this study, such a memory space/reservoir was a television channel. In fact, as José van Dijck (2008: 71) phrases it, media and memory are two concepts that we cannot conceive of separately. Media strengthens memory, while sometimes it may corrupt memory, broaden it, or even replace it. For this reason, media is a principal element that shapes our lives.

Alison Landsberg (2004: 2–3) proposed a memory type that emerged from media, which she called *prosthetic memory*. With the help of the media, which forms prosthetic memory, individuals not only grasp a historical event, but they can also possess the memory of that past event that they never personally experienced. In this way, memories that form as a reaction to the refractions of modernity no longer belong to one specific group due to the activities of the media. For instance, the memories of the Holocaust no longer solely belong to the Jews, nor

do the memories of slavery only belong to the Africans living in America. Within the scope of our study, the events witnessed and experienced in the 6 February earthquakes broadened its impact space by growing beyond the reality of the eleven provinces impacted by the disaster in the example of ER TV, which functioned as a prosthetic memory. The 6 February earthquakes are now under the protection of *mediatic memory* "a form of recall which stores information related to semantics, public, recent history recall forms" (Sözen, 1997: 13).

3. Media and journalism during disasters

Disasters can be natural, human, or technological events that affect society directly or indirectly and change people's ordinary flow of life (AFAD, 2024). One of the key factors in the proper management of disasters is disaster communication because the communication process before, during, and after a disaster has the power to change the degree of the disaster's impact on the society.

Disaster communication emerges as an essential need because people's routine life conditions disappear in the event of a disaster. People who want information about where they will live after a disaster through various media channels question how and when they can reach an ordinary flow of life (Ostertag, 2023: 5). Online citizen journalism projects, civil society and aid organisations, disaster response organisations and people involved in disasters can develop various disaster communication models through digital media (Matthews & Throsen, 2022: 232), thus more effective disaster response methods can take place.

The use of media to reduce the damages of disasters through post-disaster communication plays a critical role in the disaster management process (Dufty, 2023: 13; Mavi, 2020: 48; Şahin & Zengin Demirbilek, 2023: 330). Pre-disaster communication usually takes place in the form of risk communication. However, especially after a disaster, the media conveys the information needed by the society and contributes to the communication process in disaster management. The media has such functions as understanding the extent of the disaster, supporting the public to overcome the shock of the disaster, learning from the experience, and making positive contributions in raising awareness of disasters (Toker, 2016: 255).

Media is an indispensable tool in post-disaster crisis management because it enables mass communication. Houston et al. (2019) made significant observations about the function of the media in crisis management in their study in which they conducted interviews with expert journalists. They pointed out that primarily journalists can better observe and make news of the needs of the public on the platforms that could be set up after a disaster, and thus they could be the close followers¹ of the disaster. Moreover, they reported that maintaining interactions between the journalists and disaster-stricken people is an ethical responsibility (Houston et al., 2019). ER TV, which we selected as the memory space for our study, observed the disaster closely just as shown in the examples above. It strove to solve the problems of the locals of Malatya by bringing their needs to the agenda particularly after the disaster, thereby participating directly in crisis management.

Media also contributes to the formation of memory related to disaster through disaster journalism (Antunes et al., 2022: 522). News that keeps a record of such extraordinary times as disasters also determines the manner with which the public memory grows. For this reason, the framework in which media reports the disaster will determine the kind of memory that the media will transfer to the future.

The Kahramanmaraş earthquakes of 6 February were the largest disaster experienced recently according to the official records. There is a growing interest in the role of the media in this period and the studies on disaster news. The studies into the role that the media played in this large-scale disaster, which is now forever in public memory, are important to understand the significance of our study and the memory that was formed.² Emrah Budak (2023) conducted a study on the news related to the 6 February earthquakes using content analysis method and made detections on the role of the Turkish media in disaster journalism. In this respect, the researcher stated that the news (1) generated after the 6 February earthquakes were reported with a political dimension instead of raising public awareness, (2) highlighted rubble clearance work and traumatic elements, (3) were prepared with ideological concerns in mind, and (4) tried to give a form where "disaster was normalized", and thus Turkish media failed to perform the functions that they were ideally expected to perform in disaster management (Budak, 2023: 1106-1109). Sertac Timur Demir (2023: 712) focused on the breaches of media and ethics during the events of the 6 February earthquakes in his study and stated that the media reported the news of the post-earthquake events with manipulative content, causing information pollution.

Nevertheless, there were studies reporting beneficial functions performed by the media on the 6 February earthquakes. Firat Ata (2023) examined media shares through netnography method and found that social media performed the functions of informing the *public memory* as well as offering an arena for such public-focused functions as complaints, suggestions, forming public opinions, prevention, and requests. Particularly the "public memory" function which emphasizes the importance of learning the lessons from disasters (Ata, 2023: 623) is one of the principal functions of the media in the disaster period and disaster journalism. In our study, we may state that the TV channel strove to form a public memory by both focusing on the lessons to learn from the disaster and solving the problems faced by the local public after the disaster, as it tried to perform a beneficial function through disaster journalism.

In this respect, the media may be a guide for both positive and negative situations through the memory that it forms in disaster times. The memory that disaster-struck regions formed by the local media has the power to reveal the region's issues and disruptions it suffers much more clearly. In our study, ER TV, the sample of our study, focused on the issues that the national media failed to make visible, which afforded the chance to view the disaster *from within* for it was also a survivor of that disaster. Therefore, we can state that constructing public memory with the agency of local testimonies bearing the lived experiences is of particular importance to establish awareness and consciousness of disasters.

4. Speaking to the past: interviews on the traces of 6 February in Malatya

On 6 February 2023, a series of earthquakes in Pazarcık (magnitude 7.7) and Elbistan (magnitude 7.6) districts of Kahramanmaras affected eleven provinces of Türkiye, namely Kahramanmaraş, Hatay, Gaziantep, Malatya, Diyarbakır, Kilis, Şanlıurfa, Adıyaman, Osmanive, and Adana (AFAD, 2023: 1), According to the latest statement of the Minister of Interior, Ali Yerlikaya, a total of 53,537 people lost their lives, and 107, 213 people sustained injuries in the earthquakes (TRT Haber, 2024). The provinces that suffered the most damage in the earthquake were Kahramanmaras, Hatay, Adıyaman, and Malatya. According to the report of the Presidency of Strategy and Budget, 55.6% of the houses in Malatya were damaged (Habertürk, 2023). The "Earthquake Status Chart", 2 published by the Governorship of Malatya on 8 May 2023, reported the number of "Destroyed-Emergency Demolition-Heavily Damaged Buildings" as 45,000 (Governorship of Malatya, 2023). Consequently, Malatya sustained severe damage due to the 6 February 6 earthquakes and the aftershocks that followed. The closest observer of this damage was ER TV, one of the leading local television channels in the city. This part of the paper presents the ethnographic interviews conducted between 25 May 2024 and 25 September 2024, with four employees of ER TV. While conducting the interviews, the researchers chose not to use structured interview forms due to the nature of ethnographic studies, so the interviews took place in a conversational atmosphere in personal office environments where the participants would feel safe.

4.1. Changing working conditions of local media after the earthquake

Within the scope of the study, we first asked the participants to compare the physical conditions of the media organization in which they were employed before and after the earthquake. Thus, it was possible to make visible the effect of the destructive impact of the earthquake considered as the primary destruction of the earthquake on the functioning of the organization. While talking about the damage that the earthquake caused to the media organization, E. K. (1989, Malatya) said the following:

Our building was heavily damaged. We don't have our old materials anymore. We don't have our previous income. From a 6-story building, we now started broadcasting in a single-story steel construction building. We had two large studios. We started using a single studio. I mean, you can't see much on the screen, can you? The viewer doesn't realize it when they look at it, but when we were in it, for example, we had less material. The earthquake damaged much of it. We broadcasted in a container for about a year, and it was the first time we broadcasted under those conditions. We used one container as a studio and two as workspaces, so we had a severe problem. In fact, when water dripped into the container, for example, we kept a bucket in front of it so that our remaining materials and computers would not be damaged. Yes, we broadcasted under those conditions.

B. A. (1980, Malatya) said,

Apart from the building, we have serious losses in terms of equipment. The number of personnel has also decreased. Right now, I have one camera operator, one main controller, and one montage person. The market conditions are exceedingly difficult for us. We cannot hire any staff right now,

emphasizing that the channel lost not only its building but also its existing workforce due to the earthquake. Like the other participants, H. K. (1973, Malatya) stated that the physical conditions of the channel before the earthquake were outstanding for a local channel, but after the earthquake, they continued broadcasting under impoverished conditions, first in a gazebo and then in a container.

For ER TV, the earthquake not only caused the loss of buildings and employees, but it also led to radical changes in broadcast content. B. A. emphasized the great drop in the number of programs on the channel after the earthquake in the following words:

Before the earthquake, I was doing forty-four programs. Forty-four of our own internal productions. Forty-four people, Forty-four programmers, editors, and the like. We collaborated with a serious team. We had a team of ninety people in total, but that could reach one hundred people with external support. After the earthquake, a few of our technical staff had to leave. How many programs do we have now? We dropped from forty-four programs to four programs.

H. K., on the other hand, stated that there was a transformation in the content of the programs along with the number of programs and said, "We make programs entirely on earthquakes. In fact, I do programs six days a week for three hours in the mornings and three hours in the evenings twice a week, mostly on earthquakes". This participant added that they restructured the broadcast format of the channel completely in the aftermath of the earthquake.

Our informant Ü. G. (1992, Bingöl), like B.A., stated that the serious decrease in the number of personnel after the earthquake affected the content of the programs. Ü. G. said, "Before the earthquake, we worked with more personnel and we could also make national news, but after the earthquake, due to the decrease in our personnel, we focused only on local news, because Malatya really received a lot of damage, so it became a city we had to focus on. That is why we started making only local news," and emphasized that the channel's programs after the earthquake aimed at making Malatya's voice heard.

4.2. Post-earthquake contacts with national press

Another question asked to the participants was about their relations with the national press during the earthquake. All four participants answered questions about their contacts with the national media during this process. B. A. talked about the connection to CNN Türk live broadcast immediately after the earthquake and crying during the broadcast due to the shock of the events. B.A. said, "Malatya was completely destroyed. What can I say? Believe me, I do not normally talk like this". Following the development, B. A. recounted his experience in the following words:

First, I took my family to a safe zone, and then I came to the television station. A national channel connected me to a live broadcast. It was the first connection. Most people were still unaware of the incident. I am not a journalist. I am a TV person. They connected me with that reflex, but I am simply a citizen who lived through the incident. You know, imagine your friend in front of you under the rubble. I told my feelings in a slightly high tone. With that reaction, they understood the importance of the event, and most of

the national channels came to Malatya first thing in the morning. I mean after that first connection. I may have been instrumental in the national press coming to Malatya.

One of our participants, H. K. emphasized that for most of the journalists in the national press, Malatya was in the background, and the reason for this was its political dimensions. H. K. underlined:

The national press asked us for help, but Malatya was far behind in this regard. Because the politicians said that Malatya was not one of the cities that had experienced the earthquake and that everything was fine. In fact, AFAD had not included Malatya in the classification of heavily damaged provinces, and Malatya could not to benefit from a short-term working allowance. Hatay was number one in terms of the number of people who died and the number one in terms of collapsed buildings, and Malatya was in second place. The people of Malatya also failed, and could not succeed, in other words, they could not make their voices heard. Hatay used the social media very successfully, Kahramanmaraş, and Adıyaman. All of Türkiye saw those regions. That is why the national press came to Malatya from time to time and tried to get support from us from time to time.

In this context, this participant emphasized that both the politicians and the citizens of the city failed to emphasize the proper level of urgency. Participant Ü. G., just like H. K., emphasized that the publications in the mainstream media expressing Malatya's problems after the earthquake were insufficient. Ü. G. underscored this in the following:

Mainstream media tries to avoid bringing up too many problems and issues, as we have already seen in the period following the earthquake. They said there were not many problems in Malatya. Unfortunately, this was based on the death toll. Since the number of deaths was low, the inference was that there were not many problems in Malatya in general, but unfortunately Malatya is second only to Hatay in the provinces where the destruction was intense.

These statements show the lack of a critical approach in the mainstream media after the disaster and that they failed to sufficiently share the existing problems with the public. In this context, local media organizations filled the existing gap and brought the problems of the local people and the region to the screen. E. K. said the following:

When the agencies shared our earthquake footage, the national press benefited from it. Apart from that, as you can appreciate, since the local channel of this city knows the city better, they can tell the story better. For example, they can tell the name of the street they go to, the person they talk to knows what was there before, so I think that is why we were able to talk more about the damage. We have repeatedly called on the national media in this regard. We tried to get them to come to Malatya, but not much happened. Since Kahramanmaraş was the epicentre of the earthquake rather than Malatya, the interest was more there.

In this context, ER TV, as a local media organization, had the chance to look at the events from the inside. The other participants used similar expressions to E. K. regarding the power of the local media. B. A. said the following:

The national press focuses only on one place, such as on saving lives. But we showed all kinds of developments, the city in general. Street by street, which building was damaged, which building collapsed. Because I am a good Malatyalı, I am a child of this land, I am a person who knows every street very well. Yesterday, for example, while walking on the road, they said that this brother's shop collapsed, and this sister had this problem. Since people saw this sincerity from us, they watched us more because they believed in this sincerity. Our viewer rates increased rapidly.

This participant stated that they experienced the advantage of knowing the city and being a child of this city.

H. K., on the other hand, referring to Fulya Öztürk from the national press, commented that she could broadcast what happened in such accurate detail because she had stayed in the field in Hatay for a long time and had a good command of the situation. This participant stated the following:

What we experienced here and what the national media showed are completely different things. Members of the media would get off the plane, take two tours around the city, examine the sight, and leave the city in the evening on the same day. There is a song by the late Ahmet Kaya that goes like this: "How will you know what I went through?" Our situation is the same. Those in Hatay died, those in Kahramanmaraş died, those in Adıyaman died, those in Malatya did not die, they are still crawling.

Emphasizing that the national press is lacking in conveying what happened, in another statement, H. K. said the following:

I don't remember the time exactly, it must have been around 4.30 or 5.00, but because there were so many earthquakes, a national news agency went live in the area where the containers were. I was also watching television. The presenter pointed to the empty dark buildings and said, "They turned off the power, people must have gone outside". No! Those houses were already empty because people had abandoned them that day. The media thinks that life is going on in all the houses that are still standing. No, the lights are off because people don't know the damage to their houses. There are still thousands of buildings in Malatya with heavy damage that they have not demolished the buildings. They are still planning to demolish over 10 thousand buildings. The situation in Malatya is so severe that many people are unaware of it. Some are in court; some are dragging on in the courts.

With these words, H. K. stressed that to convey the damage in Malatya accurately, it is necessary to be a person of this city and to have a good command of what is happening in the city, otherwise misleading information and interpretations may emerge. This emphasis of H. K. was frequently repeated by other participants, as well.

4.3. Television broadcasts about the destruction caused by the earthquake

Media organizations work as a memory that stores information to make sense of and remember recent history (Sözen, 1997:13). For this reason, the information stored especially about crisis situations is important. In the words of Landsberg (2004), media is like a *prosthetic memory* and through the media, memories and experiences are in constant circulation from mind to mind.

Within the scope of this study, after asking the participants about their contacts with the national press, they answered questions about their contributions as local media organizations in creating the memory of the earthquake. E. K. said the following about this question:

I think we were able to detect better because we know most things locally. For example, we had the chance to show them one-to-one in the live broadcasts we made in front of the buildings. Of course, most of what we did was also covered in the national media, but we followed more closely some of the things that exist in both the post-earthquake and the current construction process that we have noticed that the national media failed to notice. The national press does not follow these processes anyway. For them, the first moment of destruction of the earthquake was more important. Right now, for example, when cities are recovering, the national press is only interested in how many houses have been built and how many have been handed over. I think this is all the national press is interested in. Local media is more familiar with the city and the news. When the minister answers the questions of the press, the regular national announcers do not ask questions about reserve areas, on-site transformation, the new plan of the city, the fate of historical monuments, etc. because they do not know the city, they look at the events from a distance. But here, for example, which neighbourhood is the reserve area, how many buildings are there in that neighbourhoods selected as a reserved area, which is damaged, which will be demolished, and which are intact, we are already in all of these, we know them all.

E.K. stated that the national media focused only on numbers after the earthquake and did not follow up on the recovery processes and projects of the cities. According to E. K., this is one of the main points that distinguished them from the national media. Since local media members are also earthquake survivors and worked in the city they lived in, where they were born and raised, they were comparatively more active in conveying the problems of the city.

Barbie Zelizer (2008) mentions that a member of the media needs knowledge of the past to appraise the development of the present. Another emphasis of E. K. confirms Zelizer's conclusion. E. K. said the following:

As I said before, since we are an old television channel, we have a particularly good archive. Of course, some of the archive was lost in the earthquake, but we still have what is left of an archive. Since we are also aware of some of the problems of the city, we can compare the past and the present by making use of the archive. This is a particularly important memory. For example, we had a program we shot with the elderly. People whose parents coincidentally participated in the program would call and ask us for the footage if they had lost their parents. That's how valuable the archive is for us. It is especially important for the news we do, for the news you can write, but I realized now that it was just as valuable for the audience, when people called and asked for it.

With these statements, ER TV emphasized that ER TV has a rich archive, which played an active role in both drawing attention to Malatya and contributing to the reconstruction of the city.

As understood from the statements of the participants, another crucial factor that shaped ER TV's memory of the 6 February earthquakes was the use of social media. The channel

has many social media accounts. With its 49,000 followers on Facebook, 15,000 followers on Instagram, and 14,900 subscribers on YouTube (B. A., personal interview, 25 May 2024), the channel started to use social media even more actively after the earthquake. The channel's Youtube account made specifically various earthquake-specific broadcasts. Under the name "Disaster of the Century (Malatya)" [Asrın Felaketi (Malatya)], a total of 113 programs with an average length of 30 minutes ran between 5 January 2024, and 25 June 2024. In each program, the reporters visited different neighbourhoods of Malatya, and the program showed the problems of the residents and the effects of the earthquake on screen. From October 16th, 2023, to 11 June 2024, there were a total of 86 programs with an average length of 50 minutes, titled "After the earthquake - We are coming to you" (Depremden sonra - Size geliyoruz) (ER TV, 2024c).

The content of this program was like "Disaster of the Century (Malatya)". The reporters visited different neighbourhoods in Malatya, and interviewed the residents and mukhtars, i.e. village heads or neighbourhood heads, which brought to the screen the problems that they experienced. B. A., who prepared and presented the program "Disaster of the Century (Malatya)", said the following:

The videos recorded on the channel's YouTube account summarize the period from the immediate aftermath of the earthquake until today. In fact, they write history. Our YouTube channel has a history, a flow. Anyone can use that footage whenever they want, we are in favour of the full use of these images. We want everyone to know what happened. History will write many things heavily with ER TV broadcasts. How human beings lost their moral values, ethical principles, how the mismanagement happened in the city, the people will write all of these in their memory one by one.

With these statements, this participant expresses that especially the YouTube account of the channel was an important source at the point of creating the memory of the earthquake.

From another viewpoint, according to Hoskins, television has come to be the new memory and works as an opinion leader on what to remember, when, and how (Hoskins, 2001: 341-344). Television's giving direction of memory constitutes a source of power for media organizations, especially in such extraordinary situations as earthquakes. E. K.'s explanations, who stated the following, are similar to Hoskins' assertions:

In our archive, there are records of the projects related to the Söğütlü Mosque, which is very much on the agenda today. We have what the General Director of Foundations said before, and what the current mayor said when he was a candidate. There is the project of the Söğütlü Mosque that emerged in the progressive process, and in the last project, the Söğütlü Mosque was to stand side by side with the Yeni Mosque. Later, they abandoned this project. I think that we have created a serious agenda on this issue. I think that the fact that Söğütlü Mosque is that strongly emphasized is also due to ER TV. Because we were the ones who broke that news in the first place. We carried the statement of the General Directorate of Foundations, and all the statements made at that time on the screen. Some things have a memory. It is necessary to preserve it even after natural disasters because those who leave that city and want to come back must find that memory as it was before. Obviously, we feel the responsibility for this. We are fighting

for the reconstruction of this city in accordance with its original, in accordance with its memory. To achieve this, I think we have a serious archive, and I think this archive has changed the agenda and even projects follow the information in them accordingly.

This participant stated that, just as Hoskins emphasized, they functioned as the opinion leaders and were successful in drawing the attention of the authorities to certain directions. In another statement, E. K. stated that they also directed the authorities to conduct demolitions as in the following:

The demolition process for damaged buildings continues. I think we have created a serious agenda in this regard. We have done serious work on the follow-up of the process, on the damage caused by demolitions to the environment, on asbestos. We conducted studies with doctors. What are the damages of this? What are the studies conducted in Malatya? I think that demolitions attracted attention after our news, and I think we changed the agenda on demolitions. We have done serious work on on-site separation and the inadequacy of the areas where they dump the rubble.

4.4. Contribution of local media to crisis management after the earthquake

After a disaster, one expects from media organizations delivery of the information that the public needs to manage the current crisis, focus of attention to the disaster-affected areas, and awareness raising on the disaster. In this context, the participants answered our questions about how ER TV managed the post-disaster crisis environment. The answers show that the television channel is highly active in informing the public and providing aid to those in need. H. K. said the following:

We are currently broadcasting without music. In the early days, we broadcasted for 78 hours without commercials, without interruptions, and we didn't intersperse normal movies or TV series. For months, we only shot footage from Malatya about the earthquake and made clips. B.A. was constantly in the field. After each broadcast, he was activating his social media. Those who sent shoes, clothes, financial support, food... Those who could not find containers, air conditioners, or stoves reached us and asked for help. For example, last winter, a woman in her twenties was staying in a tent with her 2-month-old baby and her husband in prison. The baby was small, there was no stove, nothing. As soon as I received information about such situations, we provided support.

With these words, this participant stated that the channel completely reorganized its content after the earthquake with a focus on the earthquake and that they worked like an aid organization for earthquake victims.

The word of E. K. also supports H. K. when pointing out that because of the news they made, they created awareness in the public for those in need as in the following words:

I think we provided a serious benefit, especially for the tradesmen. We made the voices of the tradesmen who needed containers and the tradesmen who were short of materials in the container heard. We saw that there were still people living in tents, for example. They specifically called us to make requests. One year after the earthquake, they said

that there was no one in tents, but we made a lot of news about people living in tents. Two or three days after our news, those people received containers. It was ten days ago that I made a news report. A sick person living in a container needed air conditioning. One of our viewers who lives in another city sent an air conditioner with its engine to ER TV for us to deliver it to the needy. After the points we criticized, we saw that the issue we criticized improved.

In another instance, E. K. stated that they closely followed the developments in the city after the earthquake, and thus they created an awareness among both the residents and the administrators of the city. This participant's words are the following:

We did serious work on on-site separation and the inadequacy of the areas where the workers dumped the rubble from the excavations. Concrete prices, for example, the increase in public order, theft incidents, and exorbitant prices in the city after the earthquake... You know, after the profoundly serious increases in everything from labour to concrete, when we went after this, local governments and municipalities opened concrete plants to sell concrete at a more affordable price. While making this news, we took concrete prices from neighbouring provinces that did not experience the earthquake and compared them with the concrete prices in Malatya. We made a price comparison for about 15 days. We compared the prices with those of before the earthquake. We also compared the prices in nearby provinces that are currently experiencing earthquakes. We compared the public order incidents and theft incidents there.

One of our participants, Ü. G. explained how, after the earthquake, they organized a program called "We Are Coming to You (Size Geliyoruz)" and went to a neighbourhood of Malatya every day, toured the area accompanied by the neighbourhood headman, and talked to the local people and tradesmen about their problems and demands. Ü. G. added that they solved a high number of grievances of the citizens thanks to this program and added the following:

In the past weeks, there were great grievances in the area where İkizce TOKİ residences are located. Citizens called us because there was no bread buffet, no market, no health centre, and only a few bus services. Of course, we went and reported these as news, and the next day, there was a bread buffet there. The public made a request for a school on our channel. Following our news, the Director of National Education went there and started a field survey for a school.

4.5. Changing broadcasting policy after the earthquake

In times of disasters, the media contributes to the formation of a memory of the disaster. In fact, this memory is also a source of reference for future disasters and provides the opportunity to gain wisdom from what happened. In this context, the archives of the news and programs made by the media organization during the disaster period are highly valuable. As we can understand from the statements of the participants, the most prominent policy of ER TV during the disaster period was not to leave the questions of the public unanswered. H. K. emphasizes that they worked to inform the public after the earthquake and that this information took a serious place in their archives:

We continue to make programs entirely on the earthquake. We still can't do normal programs, because people are constantly asking, they are hungry for information. I receive more than a hundred messages every day. People don't ask their questions to AFAD, they don't ask to the Environment and Urbanization, and they ask me when they can't reach the relevant units. We continued to broadcast earthquakes for three hours every day without interruption. This is also a social responsibility project. In fact, we are also doing a public service. We constantly talk about on-site transformation, and reserve area projects, what about Çırmıktı? What about Yeşilyurt? What about Doğanşehir? What will happen to the roads? What will happen to the people? Will they cut the rent subsidies? When will they draw the housing raffle? The man opposite is dictating a message to his grandson. I cannot stand up to such a man and say, I will talk about sports today. It is not possible to remain insensitive.

Conclusion

In extraordinary times, knowledge of the past is necessary to make sense of what happened. In fact, knowledge of the past is like a road map for today, from which the meaning of membership will emerge. Mastering the knowledge of the past is one of the safest ways to deal with today's chaos. Media institutions are important memory spaces that archive the information of this biological history of both visually and aurally. The bitter experience with the 6 February earthquakes necessitates thinking about the impact of the media on setting the agenda, informing, and providing opinion advice. Media organizations were the primary sources of news in the earthquakes which affected eleven provinces. Immediately after the earthquakes, it was possible to receive a good amount of reliable data from national media channels about the epicentres of the earthquakes, their magnitudes, and the loss of lives and properties. However, the effects of earthquakes had meanings far beyond numbers throughout the country. At this point, the information obtained from local media organisations of the cities affected by the earthquake is invaluable. As seen in the ethnographic interviews conducted within the scope of the study, local media can look at events from the inside compared to the national media which can look at events from the outside. Many of the local media workers were also earthquake victims and seeing the destruction of the cities where they lived and, for some, where they were born and raised, caused people to strive to convey what was right, to make the voice of the city heard, and to help the public. As seen in ER TV, beyond being a television channel, they also worked like a charity organization in the postearthquake period.

In extraordinary times, reporting accurate information from the field is especially important. In this context, ER TV's unique knowledge of the city helped to reflect the real extent of destruction and loss on the screen. This was the main point that the participants pointed out about the difference between local and national television channels. Knowledge well of the city also enabled the channel to travel the city street by street and convey current developments through its social media accounts. The broadcasts made by ER TV specifically about Malatya after the earthquake show the feature of being notes on the history of the province of Malatya following the 6 February earthquakes. In this context, the channel's archive is the digital memory

of the city. The memory in question requires learning from what happened, not forgetting it, and taking precautions against what is likely to happen. As seen in ER TV, the city's own local media follows the post-disaster events of the city more closely. The recommendation of this study is to conduct academic studies on local media outlets in other cities affected by earthquakes. Thus, it seems possible to take a closer look at the reality of earthquakes and take more detailed precautions regarding probable future earthquakes.

Notes

- 1 This term is used as "watchdog" in the study (Houston et al., 2019, p. 607). It is thought that it would be more appropriate to understand disaster communication as a follower of the process.
- 2 In this regard, the publication of the May 2023 issue of TRT Akademi magazine (Volume 08, Issue 18) with the theme of "Disaster Management and Media" and the subsequent publication of studies covering the subjects of "disaster and media", "disaster communication" and "disaster journalism" will contribute to the development of communication research. This shows that studies in this direction are increasing.
- 3 The chart in question is the most up-to-date chart published by the Malatya Governorship with the same name.

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- KK.3: E. K., 35, news director, interview date and place: 2 June 2024/Malatya.
- KK.4: Ü.G., 32, program producer/presenter, interview date and place: 25 September 2024/ Malatya.



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