

## Ruins and Remembrance: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Earthquakes

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27 December 1939, Erzincan

20 December 1942, Erbaa – Tokat

31 May 1946, Varto – Muş

7 March and 19 August, 1966 Varto – Muş

17 August 1999, Gölcük

23 October 2011, Van

6 February 2023 Kahramanmaraş – Hatay – Adıyaman...

Songs, poems, and laments...

Flashing shutters, conducted interviews, breaking news...

People are watching the rescue footage, holding their breaths... They are hoping that good news will come—that perhaps a beating heart, a breathing soul will be rescued from the rubble soon.

Amidst the chaos, a lone teddy bear appears in the picture...

But more often, though, and sadly, it is the haunting images of children without mothers and fathers, or parents left to grieve the absence of their children...

This is the picture after an earthquake in Türkiye, unfortunately.

Each time we remember the earthquakes in Türkiye, our collective memory sways like a pendulum, caught between hope and loss, ever shifting, never fully settling.

We often wondered if there is an end to this story, an end to the sorrow we feel.

How can you explain to someone who has never experienced an earthquake that a child might be named *Deprem*? Or, put differently, who would name their child “earthquake”? What could signify the memory of an earthquake more profoundly than a name carried through a lifetime?

During his field research, Erdoğan Gedik had witnessed something during a funeral he attended in İzmit, which was both surprising and saddening at the same time. On 15

February 2005, in the cemetery in front of the Cemevi in the Tavşantepe neighbourhood of İzmit, where several people from Varto lived, he saw about twenty graves of people from Varto. The date of death for all of these individuals was noted as 17 August 1999. When he asked, the crowd explained that these graves belonged to the people who had migrated from Varto after the 1966 earthquake. The survivors of the 1966 Varto earthquake had, 33 years later, fallen victim to the Marmara earthquake. After the Marmara earthquake a small group of people started returning to Varto, because the earthquake survivors had lost everything once again. Like 33 years ago, they had to start their lives over from scratch.

Erdoğan Gedik heard about a similar story after the 6 February 2023 earthquake. After the Great Erzincan Earthquake that took place on 27 December 1939, the Turkish state resettled the earthquake survivors from Erzincan in some villages of Varto. Unfortunately, these survivors were caught in the earthquakes in Varto in 1946 and 1966. After the 1966 earthquake, survivors of the Varto earthquake were settled in warmer regions such as Malatya, Adana and İskenderun. These families, who had been fleeing earthquakes since 1939, tragically found themselves once again caught in another earthquake on 6 February 2023.

It seems that the earthquake stories and their sorrows are repeating pulses in history. Therefore, the motivation for this special issue stems from a collective need to understand and reflect upon the long-lasting impact of these devastating events on individuals and communities.

However, the motivation for this issue is not just to recount the tragedies, but to explore the human condition in the aftermath of destruction. We wanted to bring light to some questions: How do communities rebuild their lives after such devastating loss? How do past earthquakes influence contemporary disaster management and migration? How can our collective memory of these events inform future resilience strategies? These and many others are the questions that we seek to address in this special issue, contributing to a deeper understanding of the complex impacts of natural disasters on people.

Our special issue begins with an article by Erdoğan Gedik, titled *The Impact of the 1966 Earthquakes on Migration and Social Change: A Case Study of Varto (Türkiye)*, which delves into the profound social transformations triggered by the 1966 Varto earthquakes, connecting migration and cultural change across internal and transnational contexts. Based on fieldwork and personal narratives, he highlights the intricate interplay of trauma, resilience, and adaptation among affected communities. The study offers a nuanced understanding of how seismic events can reshape identities, social structures, and cultural practices over generations.

In her nuanced piece, Aylin Eraslan, who herself is an earthquake survivor, examines the forced migration experience of Hatay residents after the February 2023 earthquakes, providing an in-depth analysis of the dual forces of transience and permanence shaping their lives. Grounded in ethnographic research conducted in various cities, her study sheds light on the resilience of individuals and communities as they balance their deep connection to their

homeland with the challenges of rebuilding their lives amidst displacement.

Fulya Doğruel, in the next article, explores how the Antakya earthquake affected business operations and livelihoods and emphasises resilience strategies and community recovery efforts. Post-disaster challenges such as financial instability, infrastructure collapse, and socio-emotional strains highlight the urgent need for sustainable recovery models that incorporate social equity, resilience, and targeted economic support.

Hande Birkalan-Gedik's article is a reflective analysis of *Masal Evi* (Story House), a community-driven initiative established in Halidere after the 1999 Marmara earthquake, which used traditional folktales as therapeutic tools for children coping with trauma. She delves into the transformative potential of storytelling in fostering psychological resilience, emotional expression, and community rebuilding. The article showcases how narratives became a means of healing, enabling children to navigate their experiences of loss and displacement.

While these articles tackle with the immediate impacts of earthquakes on communities, Meryem Bulut takes a different route in her article. She explores how mythological narratives across different cultures interpret earthquakes, mostly associating them with divine punishment or warnings linked to moral transgressions. Highlighting the symbolic diversity in these explanations, which reflect cultural beliefs and experiences, she also notes their similarities and the enduring relevance of such interpretations in modern contexts.

In the next article by Tülin Arseven turns the attention to the representation the number of earthquakes in Turkish literature. She notes that despite the frequency and devastation, stories focusing on the theme of earthquake in Turkish literature is very low. Selecting five stories, she tells the readers the specificity of earthquake themes in these important examples.

The following two articles focus on the relationship between media and earthquakes in different aspects. First, Erhan Arslan and Berna Arslan examine the framing of cultural heritage in Turkish media after the February 2023 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes, highlighting how historical and cultural assets were depicted in news coverage. Then, Dilar Diken Yücel and Ömer Faruk Yücel underscore the critical role of media as memory spaces in capturing and preserving the lived experiences of such extraordinary events. They examine how local media, exemplified by ER TV, contributed to crisis management, memory formation, and the rebuilding process, offering insights into disaster journalism and its societal implications.

In the next article, Cihan Sucu and Bengü Berkmen examine the impact of spiritual well-being and coping skills on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms among survivors in Kahramanmaraş earthquake. They underline that their results indicate a positive relationship between higher levels of spiritual well-being and improved coping attitudes, suggesting that enhancing spiritual well-being may help earthquake survivors manage PTSD symptoms more effectively.

Ayşe Mahinur Tezcan and Veronika İnan analyse the occurrence of crimes in regions affected by the Kahramanmaraş earthquakes, utilizing statistical data to identify trends and changes in crime rates before and after the disaster. They reveal that while crime rates initially

decreased due to social solidarity, they later increased as societal disruptions unfolded, highlighting the complex relationship between natural disasters and criminal behaviour.

Tubanur Çelik İskifoğlu and Dönay Nisa Kara examine the psychological impact of this earthquake, focusing on the anxiety levels among survivors in the affected regions. They highlight the demographic factors influencing anxiety, emphasizing the need for tailored psychosocial interventions for young individuals and those with higher education levels.

Gül Kahveci and Nergüz Bulut Serin explore the heightened psychological challenges faced by mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder after the 6 February earthquake. They examine the stress, trauma, and coping mechanisms of these mothers, emphasizing the critical need for targeted mental health support and resilience-building strategies.

Our special issue concludes with an article by Murat Gökhan Dalyan, who writes about the historical and contemporary parallels in disasters and their impact within the context of Adıyaman's seismic history. He emphasizes that lessons have not been learned from these earthquakes, while also underlining how crucial it is to develop and implement earthquake policies and legislation to avoid human and material losses.

As we reflect on the wide-ranging impacts of earthquakes on communities, cultures, and individuals, this special issue brings together diverse perspectives to illuminate the profound interplay between disaster and the human condition. Through scholarly exploration of migration, resilience, psychological adaptation, cultural preservation, and historical parallels, the contributions deepen our understanding of how societies navigate the aftermath of devastation. We aim to provide a platform for understanding the intersection of natural disasters and human experience, to reflect on the lessons learned from past events, and to explore how communities can better prepare for and recover from such traumatic occurrences. With these issues in mind, we humbly dedicate this special issue to earthquake victims.

As we near the end, we as guest editors of this issue, should express our special thanks to our esteemed colleague, our journal editor, Associate Prof. Dr Mihrican Aylanç, who supported the publication of this issue in many different ways. Although she is not an earthquake survivor herself, unlike most of our contributors, she supported this issue with exceptional dedication and sensitivity, feeling the impact of the recent earthquakes deeply in her heart. As a part of the editorial communication, it became customary to report to each other at the end of the day for three of us during the production process. The special issue would not be possible without her dedication and commitment. We were distant in geographies but always near at heart. We are deeply grateful to her for her unwavering dedication and heartfelt support throughout the process of preparing this special issue.

We had announced that this special issue would be in English, although we anticipated the language challenges it might pose for some authors. The reason was that we aimed to ensure articles about the earthquakes in Turkey could reach a broader audience. We hope that this special issue reaches this aim. Yet, within its pages lies a single piece in Turkish—a heartfelt eulogy penned by Bengü Berkmen of Cyprus International University. As this issue is dedicated to all who tragically lost their lives in all earthquakes, it is also a tribute to an

unspeakable sorrow that pierced the heart of the island: the loss of young middle and high school Turkish Cypriot volleyball players, their coaches and parents, who perished while in Türkiye for this competition. We offer this piece in Turkish, as a gesture of solace and remembrance for the bereaved families.

To close, we turn to the evocative words of Cemal Süreya, whose poetry captures the ineffable essence of loss and hope in the wake of such calamities.

### **Afyon Garındaki**

Afyon garındaki küçük kızı anımsa, hani,  
Trene binerken pabuçlarını çıkarmıştı;  
Varto depremini düşün, yardım olarak Batı'dan  
Gönderilmiş bir kutu süttozunu ve sutyeni.

Adam süttozuyla evinin duvarlarını badana etmişti,  
Karısıysa saklamıştı ne olduğunu bilmediği sutyeni,  
Kulaklık olarak kullanmayı düşünüyordu onu kışın;  
Tanrım, gerçekten çocukluk günlerinizde mi? ...

Eşiklere oturmuş bir dolu insan  
Keşke yalnız bunun için sevseydim seni.

**Cemal Süreya, Güz Bitiği**

Frankfurt am Main, 30 Kasım 2024