Oral History as a Method for Peace Journalists: Sevgül Uludağ as a Case Study

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Sevgül Uludağ is an internationally renowned Turkish-Cypriot journalist. She describes herself as a peace activist and at the same time a journalist. In recent years, she has begun doing oral history, interviewing people in search of missing persons and mass graves in both sides of Cyprus.

In this paper, I will evaluate her work from the point of peace journalism. Peace journalism, as an alternative to traditional conflict oriented journalism, not only tries to contribute peace initiatives, it also calls journalists to investigate the wrongdoings in both sides. In the famous chart created by Johan Galtung (2006), contrasting peace journalism with war journalism, it is stated that peace journalism humanizes all sides; focuses on invisible effects of violence; exposes untruths of all sides; uncovers all cover-ups; focuses on suffering all over; gives name to all evil-doers.

These are all what Sevgül Uludağ has been doing. She began interviewing the children of the missing persons. She called those children the "Oysters with the Missing Pearls". She then began searching the missing persons in both communities under the title, "In Search of the Missing Persons". She interviewed the children of the victims of nationalisms on both sides under the title of "The Orphans of Nationalism". Recently she has started publishing interviews about missing persons and mass graves in Cyprus. Her work is also a good example of oral history. Oral history can be defined as a method of collecting first hand knowledge on the significant events of the past. As an oral historian, Sevgül Uludağ aims at painting the history of ordinary people as it is never told in the official history.

Sevgül Uludağ: A Short Biography

Sevgül Uludağ was born in 1958 in Nicosia, and graduated

from the English College. Her journalism career begun in 1980 in the *Nothern Weekly Mail*. This newspaper, owned by Raif Denktash was an English language weekly. Her job in the paper was to redact the paper. After a while, when the only reporter of the paper, Alan Cavinder, resigned from the paper, she was asked to fill the pages. Her first journalistic product was a series on the beauties and historical values of Cyprus. She then wrote an investigative article on Arabahmet women. Uludağ won her first journalistic awards with these stories from the Turkish Journalists Union. She actually received two awards, one in the investigative journalism, and the other in the reportage.

She moved to *Olay*, a weekly news magazine owned by Ismet Kotak. She was writing on culture and history, and doing interviews for the magazine. Then Ismet Kotak started publishing the first popular newspaper, *Kıbrıs Postası* where she continued publishing her interviews.

From the beginning, she concentrated on doing investigative stories with interviews. One of the first things she did for *Kıbrıs Postası* was an investigative story on "Disappearing Crafts". She says that these series took the interests of the readers, because they were the first stories on the topic (Irvan, 2007).

She was fired from the paper, because of a series called "Gençlik Gençlik Dediğimiz" (What We Call Youth). In the series she was investigating the problems of the youth. She interviewed a drug user, a soldier, an unemployed, an apprentice etc.. The story on the soldier took the reaction of the military. Because the soldier was saying how unreasonable the military service was, how they were beaten etc. The military wanted to know the name of the soldier.

After *Kıbrıs Postası*, she joined the staff of *Yenidüzen* newspaper where she first prepared international news pages. In 1987, she was awarded the Julius Fucik Medal of Honor by the International Organization of Journalists. Unfortunately, this award resulted with her unemployment (Irvan, 2007).

She then established Uludağ News Agency with the help of her husband, Zeki Erkut. She worked as a freelance journalist trying to sell stories to different newspapers.

Sevgül Uludağ returned to *Yenidüzen* in 1998. However, for a long time she was not allowed to write there. With a group of journalists, they established the first internet journal in North Cyprus, *The Cocroaches*, in 2001. The slogan of the journal is, "Cocroaches are not dirty. They live to clean the dirt. The state does not like Cocroaches, because they remind the state how dirty it is."

Oral History as a Method

Oral history can be defined as a method of historical investigation through "interviews with the living survivors of the time being investigated" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oral_history, retrieved on April 28, 2007). The method is primarily used by historians to get first-hand knowledge about certain historical events. According to Paul Thompson (2000), existing records of history "reflect the standpoint of authority" (p. 6-7). In contrast, oral history, by way of giving opportunity to the witnesses, "provides a more realistic and fair reconstruction of the past, a challenge to the established account" (p. 7). Since oral history relies on the memories of the witnesses, there are some criticisms on using memories to search the past. Two terms need to be mentioned here: reliability and validity.

In terms of oral history interviews, reliability refers to the consistency of the interviewee "to tell the same story about the same events on a number of occasions" (Hoffman, 1974, p. 25). In other words, reliability is about the trustworthiness of the witnesses. Validity refers to the conformity of the oral testimony to the other records of history (Hoffman, 1974, p. 25). In order to test the validity of oral testimonies, we may use written records or similar testimonies. However, it is better to think that the testimony provided by the informants as being revelatory (Blee, 1993, p. 598). As Alessandro Portelli (1997) argued, "what the informant believes is indeed a fact (that is, the fact that he or she believes it) just as much as what 'really' happened" (p. 67). Therefore, the credibility problem should be assessed differently. Again, according to Portelli (1997), "the importance of oral testimony may lie not in its adherence to fact, but rather in its departure from it... Therefore, there are no 'false' oral sources" (p. 68).

Peace Journalism

Peace journalism as a concept has become popular in the

last decade. According to Jack M. Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick (2005), "peace journalism is when editors and reporters make choices –of what stories to report and about how to report them- that create opportunities for society at large to consider and value non-violent responses to the conflict" (p. 5). The basic premise of peace journalism is that the media can and should play a positive role in promoting peace (Irvan, 2006; Shinar, 2004).

According to Johan Galtung (2006) who coined the term, peace journalism is an ethical alternative to war journalism which is the dominant style in the global media market (p. 1). Galtung's conceptualization of peace journalism as opposed to war journalism sheds light to what I am trying to do here in this article. Peace journalism is not just a better practice for dealing with currrent conflicts, it also asks journalists to look at the historical roots of the current conflicts. In order to better understand what Sevgül Uludağ has been doing, I will use Galtung's (2006) conceptualization:

- 1. Peace journalism is peace-oriented:
 - It gives voice to all parties; shows empathy and understanding.
 - It humanizes all sides.
 - It focuses on invisible effects.
- 2. Peace journalism is truth-oriented:
 - It exposes untruths on all sides.
 - It uncovers all cover-ups.
- 3. Peace journalism is people oriented:
 - It focuses on sufferings on all sides; giving voice to the voiceless.
 - It names all evil-doers.
- 4. Peace journalism is solution-oriented:
 - It highlights peace initiatives.
 - It focuses on reconciliation.

In a similar vein, some of the suggestions made by Jake Lynch and Annabel McGoldrick (2005, pp. 28-31) to conduct peace journalism also helps us understand the journalistic approach of Sevgül Uludağ. Especially three of their 17 suggestions explain her journalistic attitude very well.

- 1.Peace journalists should avoid focusing exclusively on the suffering of one side. They should treat as equally the sufferings of all sides.
- 2.Peace journalists should avoid victimizing language. They should not just ask what people feel; they should also ask how they are coping with and what

they think. Do they have any suggestions?

3. Peace journalists should try to name all wrongdoers, and treat allegations made for all parties equally seriously.

The first series: The Oysters Which Lost Their Pearls

Sevgül Uludağ made her first series of interviews with the children of missing persons. The people she talked were Tijen Gülle, Kutlay Erk, Özel Pinardan, Mehmet Ali Göçer, Semi Bora and Salih Bayraktar. These interviews were first published in *Yenidüzen* (New Order) newspaper in January and February 2002. She later republished all interviews in a book called *İncisini Kaybeden İstiridyeler* (Oysters Which Lost Their Pearls) in 2005. In the introduction she wrote for the book, she says, "everything started with my learning that Kutlay Erk was a child of a missing person" (2006a, p. 13). Because the issue of the missing persons was a taboo subject in the Turkish Cypriot community (2006a, p. 13).

Tijen Gulle was just an eleven months old baby, when her father went missing on 18th of December, 1963. In the interview, Sevgül Uludağ asks questions mostly related to her feelings about being a daughter of a missing father: "What kind of feeling was it to grow up with knowing that your father was missing? What kind of feeling is it that there is no grave? How was your mother affected? In order our children not to live similar pains, what sort of Cyprus do you have in your mind?" etc (Uludağ, 2006a, pp. 23-29).

Kutlay Erk was 11 years old when his father went missing in December, 1963. Since he remembers his father, Sevgül Uludağ's first question was "what do you remember about your father?" She then asks, "what happened in 1963?" We learn from the interview that Kutlay Erk went to the Kyrenia Gate every day when exchange of prisoners of war began. But his father never came (Uludağ, 2006a, p. 30-41).

Özel Pınardan was 6 years old when his father went missing in August 1974 during the second operation of the Turkish army. His family was trying to escape from Greek Cypriot gangs. She asks, "what do you remember from that day?" then, "was it the last time you saw your father?" We learn from the interview that the tractor his father was trying to escape with was found, but there was no sign about his father (Uludağ, 2006a, pp. 42-49).

The brother of Mehmet Ali Göçer disappeared on the 29th of December, 1963 from Aretyu village. Sevgül Uludağ starts the interview with this explanation: "Mehmet Ali bey, your brother Naim Huseyin disappeared on 29th of December in 1963" He replies: "He did not disappear. He was taken from home by the Greek Cypriot police" (Uludağ, 2006a, p. 50). She then asks, "what happened

that day?" One further question, "what should be done to stop the pain you have been living with?"

Şemi Bora was 12 years old when his father Şahap Şemi disappeared on 26th of December in 1963. The first question Sevgül Uludağ asked was, "what was the job of your father in 1963?" Then second question, "when did he disappeared?" Then, "what happened that day?" Another question, "what calms you heart? I am sure it must be a terrible feeling. Do you have a grudge against Greek Cypriots?" Another question, "what should be done to make you feel better? What is your solution to the Cyprus problem?" (Uludağ, 2006a, pp. 57-62).

Salih Bayraktars father was shot dead in 1957 by the EOKA underground organization. Salih Bayraktar was 10 years old when he lost his father. He is not in the list of the missing, but the perpetrators are still not known.

The second series: In Search of the Missing Persons

Sevgül Uludağ began conducting her second series of interviews which she named "in search of the missing persons". These interviews were not only conducted with the Turkish Cypriots, she also began interviewing Greek Cypriots who have lived similar pains. The interviews were first published in *Yenidüzen* newspaper in July and August 2004. She republished 9 of these interviews in *İncisini Kaybeden İstiridyeler* (Oysters Which Lost their Pearls) in 2005.

From those tragic stories, we learn that Sevilay Berk lost her father and mother on the 11th of May in 1964. She then was 17 years old. Her family was living in the village of Bahçeler close to Famagusta. That day her father and mother did not return from Famagusta (Uludağ, 2006a, pp. 91-112).

Ülgen Gülnihal was 11 years old when her father Hasan Halil Bulli disappeared on the same day of Sevilay Berk's parents, on the 11th of May in 1964 (Uludağ, 2006a, pp. 114-132).

From these two interviews we learn that the bones of both Sevilay Berk's parents and Ülgen Gülnihal's father were found in a mass grave.

Maria Yeorgiadis talks about her father, mother, sister and brother who all went missing in 1974 from Değirmenlik (Kitrea) village. Maria says, "the only thing I want to find out is the bones of my family...I want to do a proper burial ceremony for them...This is a humanitarian wish, nothing else... What has happened in the past has happened. The river cannot flow back" (Uludağ, 2006b, pp. 140-141).

Cemaliye Şoforel lost her husband and her son in 1974. They were taken from the village of Dohni with other 72 men and boys on the $15^{\rm th}$ of August by the Greek Cypriots

as the prisoners of war. They were put in two buses to a destination—a mass grave near Muttayaga—to be killed and buried (Uludağ, 2006b, pp. 146-147). Cemaliye Şoforel remembers her son's last wish: "Mama! Come and kiss me for the last time please! Come and kiss me one last time" (Uludağ, 2006b, p. 146).

Spiros Hacinikolau was five years old when his father disappeared from Yialoussa (Yeni Erenköy) village in 1974. His father, Takis Hadjinikolaou was a judge. He was taken from the village with 8 other people (Uludağ, 2006b, pp. 36-44). Spiros' answer to the question, "why is it important to find out what happened to the missing persons?" is important to understand the psychology of the people who have never had the chance of learning what happened to their missing: "Because this is logical. It's common sense. Until you get the bones of your loved one back, you must not believe that he or she is dead. You need to see proof for that. And culturally, you need a grave, you want to visit that grave, light a candle, bring some flowers" Uludağ, 2006b, pp. 41-42).

Costas Kunduris talks about his father who disappeared from Stroncilo village on the 14th August in 1974. Sevgül Uludağ wrote: "Some men, coming from outside the village, collected the 8 Greek Cypriots from Stroncilo. Among them was Yiannis Kunduris, the father of Kostas and two of his uncles. According to rumors, they were not Turkish soldiers but Turkish Cyprot soldiers from the village of Sinda (Inonu)...Like all missing stories, there is no way to confirm what exactly happened. People are silent, people don't talk, people fear that if they utter a word, they would be in trouble" (Uludağ, 2006b, pp. 46-47). She quotes Costas Kunduris as saying: "If I found out that a Turkish Cypriot was responsible for the disappearance of my father, I would not want to take revenge. Because I know that this happened during a period when nationalism was very strong. That is why I am not thinking of taking revenge from anyone" (Uludağ, 2006b, p. 49).

The third series: Persons Who Returned From the Edge of Death

In 2004, she interviewed a number of people who were shot and wounded, but had the luck to survive. Suat Hüseyin Kafadar was lucky to escape from a massacre in 1974. He is from Dohni. On the 15th of August that year, Greek Cypriot gunmen came to the village, collected all men and put them in a bus. The bus stopped near Ayafila village. Then Greek Cypriots began shooting all the prisoners of war. He was wounded, but he played dead (Uludağ, 2004a).

Costas Panayotu Artemiu was shot to dead with 15 other Greek Cypriots in 1974, but he succeeded to survive. Sevgul Uludağ asks him: "Did you believe that you were alive?" He replies: "When they lined us up in front of a wall to shoot, I believed that I couldn't survive. Then I was

only lucky" (Uludağ, 2004b).

Petros Souppouris was ten years old when he succeeded to survive a massacre in Balikesir in 1974. He was wounded, but all of his family was killed in the massacre (Uludağ, 2004c).

Huseyin Akansoy was taken from Muratağa as a prisoner of war by Greek Cypriots. However, his family was killed in the massacre in 1974 (Uludağ, 2004d).

Hüseyin Hasn Kuzuli is a sepherd from Sandallar village. In 1974, he escaped from the massacre because he hid in a cave (Uludağ, 2004e).

Mustafa Şadanoğlu is from Atlılar village. He escaped from the massacre because he was a volunteer soldier in the 1974 war in Famagusta. He lost all his family (Uludağ, 2005f).

Yiannos Demetriou was eleven years old in 1974 when his village Aşşa (Paşaköy) was invaded by gunmen. Then they were allowed to go to the South. However, his grandfather is in the missing persons list (Uludağ, 2004g).

Christoforos Skarparis was living in Aşşa (Paşaköy) village during the war in 1974. He and his family drove to the South (Uludağ, 2004h).

Hasan Paşa was arrested in 1974 as a prisoner of war. He was beaten to death, but he succeeded to survive (Uludağ, 2004i).

Panikos Neocleous joined the war in 1974. He tells his story of how he escaped from Kyrenia to Larnaka (Uludağ, 2004j).

The fourth series: The Orphans of Nationalism

In 2005, Sevgül Uludağ conducted another series of interviews with the children and wives of those who were killed by underground organizations in both sides. Sevgül wrote in the introduction to the series: "They were the orphans or widows of nationalism. Those who killed their fathers or husbands were the death squads of nationalism" (Uludağ, 2005a).

Stella Mişaulis Dimitriu was 10 years old when her father Kostas Mişaulis was killed with Derviş Ali Kavazoğlu in 1965 by Turkish Cypriot underground organization, TMT.

Andreas Dimitriu Tofaris, husband of Stella Mişaulis Dimitriu, was only 5 years old when his father, Ilias Tofaris was killed by Greek Cyriot underground organization, EOKA, in 1958. Sevgul Uludağ asks Andreas, "why did they kill your father?" He replies, "It was certainly a political homicide. My father was a member of AKEL and

PEO. In those years, Grivas was killing the leftists. He was trying to terrorize everyone, because the leftist movement was growing, broadening, and improving its effectiveness. Grivas was trying to stop this" (Uludağ, 2005b).

Ayşe Zeytincioğlu was a two-years-old child when her father, Fazıl Önder was shot dead in 1958 (Uludağ, 2005c). Fazıl Önder was the owner of the newspaper *İnkılapçı* (The Revolutionary). According to Sevgül Uludağ, Fazıl Önder was killed by the Turkish Cypriot underground organization, TMT, because of his political views (Uludağ 2006b, p. 221).

Hifsiye Hikmet was 4 years old when her father Ayhan Hikmet and his friend Muzaffer Gürkan were shot dead in 1962. His father and Muzaffer Gürkan were journalists and publishing a newspaper called *Cumhuriyet* (The Republic). Sevgul Uludağ asks Hifsiye Hikmet: "You were 4 years old when your father was killed. Do you remember anything from that day?" She replies: "Yes, I remember almost everything." She asks: "What do you remember?" Hifsiye Hikmet answers: "That night, we had guests in our house...We slept after guests had left. Then I heard my mother's scream: Help! Help! They killed my husband... Then I remember, a lot of journalists came to our house. I was in my mother's arms. I barely remember seeing my father's dead body" (Uludağ, 2005d).

Sevgül Uludağ with Greek Cypriot journalist Makarios Drusiotis also interviewed Emin Hikmet (Uludağ, 2005e). Emin Hikmet was only two years old when his father Ayhan Hikmet was murdered. They ask him: "What happened that night? You were two years old. Do you remember anything from that night?" He answers: "This is a good question and the answer is, whatever I remember is the memories of a child. They are invalid, they are only memories. They may be correct, may be not. If you ask how it happened, I don't know. I don't know whether they are my dreams, or the reality."

Huriye Alpay is the wife of Alpay Mustafa. Alpay Mustafa was an active member of the Turkish Cypriot underground organization. He was murdered on 22nd of January in 1967 while under arrest in Nicosia polis station. According to Huriye Alpay, her husband was murdered by the head of TMT organization in order to silence him (Uludağ, 2005f).

Sevgül Uludağ also interviewed Bora Alpay, the son of Alpay Mustafa. Bora Alpay was only seven months old when his father was killed in the cell of the police station. She asks Bora: "What do you think happened? Everyone says something. You probably talked to a lot of people?" He answers: "I think, they tried to create an excuse. Simple reasons. The incident in Çağlayan that night was not very important. But that was the justification." "What could have been the real reason?" she asks. Bora Alpay says: "I don't really know. There could be a number of reasons. It

could be that my father was trying to leave TMT. Because he was telling my mother that, 'I am fed up with this dirty job. I have to leave. I have a son now'. This could be the first reason. He wanted to leave the organization" (Uludağ, 2005g).

Olgun Dayıoğlu talks about his grandfather, Ali Fehim Osman who was murdered in 1966. But the perpetrator was not found. Ali Osman Fehim had been arrested three times by Turkish Cypriot authorities for not obeying orders (Uludağ, 2005h).

Petros Petru is the son of Mihalis Petru who was killed by EOKA, the Greek Cypriot underground organization in 1958. Petros believes that his father was killed to further the policy of dividing Cyprus (Uludağ, 2005i).

The fifth series: Cyprus Untold Stories

In 2006, Sevgul Uludağ has begun a new series which still continues today, and nobody knows how and when it will end. She started the series with an informer line for the witnesses. She says that this last series of interviews are totally under the control of the readers. While beginning the series, she made an announcement, writing that "if you know something, call me. If you don't want to talk to me, here is the telephone number of the Committee for the Missing Persons. Call them. If you know something, talk" (Irvan, 2007). This is a very creative way of doing peace journalism.

Conclusion

There have been several attempts to compare oral history with journalism (Feldstein, 2004; Tisdale, 2000). For Tisdale, both journalists and oral historians are "involved in compiling information that relies on the preparation of questions for witnesses to events, the accuracy of witness testimony, and the interpretations of what the witnesses experienced" (2000, p. 41). There are similarities and differences: "The journalist reports current events. The oral historian is more concerned with events long after they occurred" (Tisdale, 2000, p. 42). However, they are both concerned with accuracy and credibility (Tisdale, 2000, p. 44). Feldstein calls oral history as the kissing cousin of journalism. "The objective of both journalism and oral history is to record truth" (Feldstein, 2004, p. 5).

Although a journalist, Sevgül Uludağ's work is mostly oral history. Almost all interviews are life-story interviews, beginning from birth to today. Therefore, all of them are quite long. For example, interview with Sevilay Berk is 4688 words; Maria Georgiades' interview is 3226 words; Interview with Suat Kafadar is 3513 words. Secondly, she defines her position as the natural transmitter. She says in the last paragraph of her book: "Many would stop me in the middle of the street to whisper 'secrets', to point out a burial site or to share a story from their past...I have only been their 'mouthpiece', publishing what they want

to say" (Uludağ, 2006b, p. 469).

Why should her work be counted as peace journalism? First reason I could give is her aim. She says: "I was uncovering the truth, the untold stories of ordinary people—I was trying to find out (and I am still trying to do that) what actually happened on this island that brought us to the point we are at today (Uludağ, 2006b, p. 23). However, she does not stop there. She acts as a self-appointed Reconciliation Committee to bring people from both communities together to share their past experiences and feelings. Because she believes that a true peace can only be established through reconciliation (Uludağ, 2006b, p. 197). For her, in order to move to a peaceful future, it is necessary to acknowledge what really happened in the past (Uludağ, 2006b, p. 35). As Desmond Tutu, the chairperson of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission put it, "however painful the experience, the wounds of the past must not be allowed to fester. They must be opened. They must be cleaned...Reconciliation based on falsehood, on not facing up the reality, is not true reconciliation" (Tutu, 1998, p. 7).

Second reason is her courage to uncover crimes in the past in both communities. As Andreas Paraschos, the editor of the Greek Cypriot newspaper Politis, wrote in the foreword to the Oysters with the Missing Pearls, "Sevgul Uludag, more courageous and much more correct, has done a radical movement. She has not looked for a door to enter the problem. She lifted the roof and saw it from above... She went down inside and started to walk it through" (Uludağ, 2006b, p. 12). In line with how Johan Galtung (2006), Jake Lynch and Annabel McCormick (2005) described peace journalism, she has not concentrated on the sufferings in only one side. Third reason is her understanding of journalism. She believes that instead of using every occasion to create more hatred and the feelings of vengeance, journalists from both sides of Cyprus should focus on the roots of the conflict, on the reasons behind what happened, on the people who were responsible for the crimes (Uludağ, 2006b, pp. 196-197).

As a conclusion, Sevgül Uludağ is a good example for journalists and journalism students who think journalism must have a mission to help establish peace. She also shows us how the method of oral history can be used to let ordinary people to tell their version of truth against the "official truth" (Uludağ, 2006b, p. 23).

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