



The Divided City: On Memory and Forgetting in Ancient Athens

Nicole Loraux

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Athens, 403 B.C.E. The bloody oligarchic dictatorship of the Thirty is over, and the democrats have returned to the city victorious. Renouncing vengeance, in an act of willful amnesia, citizens call for -- if not invent -- -amnesty. They agree to forget the unforgettable, the "past misfortunes," of civil strife or stasis. More precisely, what they agree to deny is that stasis -- -simultaneously partisanship, faction, and sedition -- -is at the heart of their politics. Continuing a criticism of Athenian ideology begun in her pathbreaking study *The Invention of Athens*, Nicole Loraux argues that this crucial moment of Athenian political history must be interpreted as constitutive of politics and political life and not as a threat to it. Divided from within, the city is formed by that which it refuses. Conflict, the calamity of civil war, is the other, dark side of the beautiful unitary city of Athens. In a brilliant analysis of the Greek word for voting, *diaphora*, Loraux underscores the conflictual and dynamic motion of democratic life. Voting appears as the process of dividing up, of disagreement -- -in short, of agreeing to divide and choose. Not only does Loraux reconceptualize the definition of ancient Greek democracy, she also allows the contemporary reader to rethink the functioning of modern democracy in its critical moments of internal stasis.

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