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Emine Ay

# Remembering without Confronting

Memorialization as a Reparation  
without Coming to Terms with the  
Past: Case study: Ulucanlar Prison  
Museum

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MEMORIALIZATION AS A REPARATION WITHOUT COMING  
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PRISON MUSEUM

## FOREWORD

The European Master's Degree in Human Rights and Democratisation (EMA) is a one-year intensive programme launched in 1997 as a joint initiative of universities in all EU Member States with support from the European Commission. Based on an action- and policy-oriented approach to learning, it combines legal, political, historical, anthropological and philosophical perspectives on the study of human rights and democracy with targeted skills-building activities. The aim from the outset was to prepare young professionals to respond to the requirements and challenges of work in international organisations, field operations, governmental and non-governmental bodies, and academia. As a measure of its success, EMA has served as a model of inspiration for the establishment of six other EU-sponsored regional master's programmes in the area of human rights and democratisation in different parts of the world. These programmes cooperate closely in the framework of the Global Campus of Human Rights, which is based in Venice, Italy.

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Each year the EMA Council of Directors selects five theses, which stand out not only for their formal academic qualities but also for the originality of topic, innovative character of methodology and approach, potential usefulness in raising awareness about neglected issues, and capacity for contributing to the promotion of the values underlying human rights and democracy.

The EMA Awarded Theses of the academic year 2018/2019 are:

- Ay, Emine, *Remembering without Confronting. Memorialization as a Reparation without Coming to Terms with the Past: Case study: Ulucanlar Prison Museum*. Supervisor: Gabor Olah, Masaryk University, Brno.
- Basso, Francesca, *In Pain Thou Shalt Bring Forth Children? For a Human Right to Pain Relief in Childbirth*. Supervisor: Helena Pereira De Melo, New University of Lisbon.
- Dewaele, Janne, *The Use of Human Rights Law in Climate Change Litigation. An Inquiry into the Human Rights Obligations of States in the Context of Climate Change; and the Use of Human Rights Law in Urgenda and other Climate Cases*. Supervisor: Claire Vial, Université de Montpellier.
- Gómez del Valle Ruiz, Álvaro, *“A Community of Shared Destiny”: How China Is Reshaping Human Rights in Southeast Asia*. Supervisor: Karol Nowak, Lund University.
- Veit, Meredith, *Blockchain and Journalism: The Intersection between Blockchain-Based Technology and Freedom of the Press*. Supervisor: Jónatas Machado, University of Coimbra.

The selected theses demonstrate the richness and diversity of the EMA programme and the outstanding quality of the work performed by its students. On behalf of the Governing Bodies of EMA and of all participating universities, we congratulate the authors.

Prof. Manfred NOWAK  
Global Campus Secretary General

Prof. Thérèse MURPHY  
EMA Chairperson

Dr Wiebke LAMER  
EMA Programme Director  
University of Lisbon.

This publication includes the thesis *Remembering without Confronting. Memorialization as a Reparation without Coming to Terms with the Past: Case study: Ulucanlar Prison Museum* by Emine Ay and supervised by Gabor Olah, Masaryk University, Brno.

#### BIOGRAPHY

Before obtaining her MA degree from European Master's in Human Rights and Democratisation, Emine Ay did her BA at Hacettepe University, English Language and Literature and Sociology departments. She was already doing her master's in Human Rights at Ankara University before undertaking EMA, which however, she could not complete as governmental purge swept academia in Turkey. Emine currently works as an English instructor.

#### ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study is to analyse Ulucanlar Prison Museum, as an example of the memorial museum genre, and as a memorialisation attempt of an era which was marked with a confrontation discourse in Turkey. The data collected from the interviews conducted with the ex-prisoners and museum visitors as well as the semiological reading of the museum have been analysed with multi-modal ethnography in the light of the historical-political context of Turkey, collective memory theory and transitional justice theory with the aim of revealing the politics surrounding the museum; its contribution to individual healing and recognition as a symbolic reparation; promotion of human rights and raising awareness of their violations; and transmitting the heritage of the past with the message *never again*.

*Keywords: Collective memory, human rights, memorialisation, confrontation*

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*and...*

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TABLE OF ABBREVIATIONS

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| AKP       | Justice and Development Party                                     |
| EU        | European Union  |
| HRO       | Human rights organisation   |
| IHD       | Human Rights Association  |
| MAZLUMDER | The Associations of Human Rights and Solidarity for the Oppressed |
| PKK       | The Kurdistan Workers' Party                                      |
| TIHV      | Turkish Human Rights Association                                  |
| TMMOB     | Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects             |
| UPM       | Ulucanlar Prison Museum   |

## TABLE OF FIGURES

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Figure 1 Ulucanlar Prison Museum   | 46 |
| Figures 2-4 Newspaper pages 1-3 covering Ulucanlar massacre  | 50 |
| Figure 5 the gallows by which important political-religious figures are said to have been hanged         | 53 |
| Figure 6 the Hilton ward which hosted important figures as inmates                                       | 54 |
| Figure 7 Picture showing the politician Bülent Ecevit who stayed at Hilton Ward                          | 54 |
| Figure 8 Picture and biography of Sırrı Süreyya Önder before it was removed from the museum              | 57 |
| Figure 9 Picture of Selçuk Özdağ, MP of AKP, whose biography was replaced by that of Sırrı Süreyya Önder | 57 |
| Figure 10 the list of the people who were executed at Ulucanlar Prison                                   | 59 |
| Figure 11 the wall on which the poem by Nazım Hikmet is inscribed  | 61 |
| Figure 12 the wall on which the poem by Necip Fazıl is inscribed   | 61 |
| Figure 13 the 2nd Ward which has been opened eight years after the museum's inauguration                 | 63 |
| Figure 14 the hamam (bath) after the restoration   | 64 |
| Figure 15 the hamam (bath) after the restoration   | 65 |
| Figure 16 wax mannequin holding his face with despair  | 88 |
| Figure 17 wax mannequin in disciplinary cell   | 88 |
| Figure 18 wax mannequin shackled   | 88 |



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Foreword  | II  |
| Biography   | IV  |
| Abstract  | IV  |
| Table of abbreviations  | VI  |
| Table of figures  | VII |
| 1. INTRODUCTION   | 1   |
| 1.1 Context and justification of the topic  | 1   |
| 1.1.1 Structure   | 5   |
| 1.2 Methodology   | 6   |
| 2. COLLECTIVE MEMORY THEORY   | 9   |
| 2.1 Memory as a social phenomenon   | 9   |
| 2.2 The tension between memory and history: the shift from<br>semantic to episodic memories | 11  |
| 2.3 An increasing attention to the commemoration and memory:<br>memory boom                 | 13  |
| 3. MEMORY, SPATIALITY AND POLITICS OF REMEMBRANCE   | 16  |
| 3.1 Museums and authority   | 16  |
| 3.2 Memorial museums as a new form of remembrance:<br>truth holders and emotional places    | 18  |
| 3.3 Prisons as memory spaces: spatiality of memory  | 21  |
| 3.4 The politics of remembrance   | 23  |
| 4. JUSTICE AND MEMORY   | 26  |
| 4.1 Morality and ethics of remembrance  | 26  |
| 4.2 Memory and human rights   | 29  |
| 4.2.1 Transitional justice and memory   | 30  |
| 4.2.2 Memorialisation as a form of reparation   | 31  |

## REMEMBERING WITHOUT CONFRONTING

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| 5. TURKEY AND CONFRONTATION WITH THE LEGACY OF THE PAST            | 36  |
| 5.1 Historical context   | 36  |
| 5.1.1 A democracy interrupted with coup d'états                    | 36  |
| 5.1.2 1990s: a decade plagued with conflicts and state violence    | 38  |
| 5.2 Attempts to come to terms with the past in Turkey              | 39  |
| 5.2.1 Grassroots activism for confrontation                        | 39  |
| 5.2.2 Official attempts for confrontation                          | 41  |
| 5.3 Confrontation: an empty gesture                                | 43  |
| 6. CASE STUDY: ULUCANLAR PRISON MUSEUM                             | 46  |
| 6.1 History of prison  | 46  |
| 6.2 From prison to museum: the contested process of transformation | 47  |
| 6.3 The politics behind the museum                                 | 49  |
| 6.3.1 Reflections of the main historical events in the museum      | 49  |
| 6.3.2 Representation of the victims                                | 54  |
| 6.3.3 Structural changes made in the museum                        | 62  |
| 6.4 Reactions of the ex-prisoners to the museum                    | 66  |
| 6.4.1 The legacy of the ex-prisoners' memory in the museum         | 66  |
| 6.4.2 Emotional outcome of the museum in ex-prisoners              | 72  |
| 6.4.3 The function of Ulucanlar as a museum                        | 75  |
| 6.4.4 Recognition  | 78  |
| 6.5 Reactions of the visitors to the museum                        | 80  |
| 6.5.1 The motivation for visiting                                  | 80  |
| 6.5.2 What visitors learnt about the past                          | 82  |
| 6.5.3 Emotional outcome  | 86  |
| 6.5.4 The message conveyed from the museum                         | 91  |
| 7. CONCLUSION  | 95  |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY   | 101 |
| ANNEX  | 108 |
| Interview questions with ex-prisoners                              | 108 |
| Interview questions with museum visitors                           | 108 |

*... to all those who are behind bars for the crime of having opinions  
all around Turkey ...*

1.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTEXT AND JUSTIFICATION OF THE TOPIC

Countries which have gone through military coups or any kind of oppressive regimes – yet did not face their past – have a lot buried in their histories. The memories of those periods pass from one generation to another with songs, stories, oral narration, letters, diaries and many other means of oral and verbal expressions. However, this is not the only realm where collective memory resides. Memory has a spatial side where the legacy of the past resonates the vibes of those days telling their stories in various forms such as monuments, statues, dungeons, prisons and architecture in general.

Enclosed and disconnected places removed from the public sphere, prisons are such places which can be resembled to a black box that keeps a record of the atrocities committed during oppressive rule and thus can tell a lot about them. Many human rights violations, such as torture, ill-treatment and killing, take place behind the bars off the record, with little evidence left behind. Still, even if little is known about them, if one has no first-hand experience there, everyone knows what might be going on in prisons by means of memory of those who experienced it. In other words, no matter how enclosed they are, prisons are known to be the centre of the torture and atrocities of an oppressive regime by everyone. They are in the collective memory of the neighbourhood they are located in.

In its very short lifespan, Turkish democratic life has been interrupted by many coup d'états, military memorandums and takeover attempts. There has not been two consecutive decades with a consistent democracy in which democratic mechanisms and civil rights and liberties could function normally. The spiral of silence and fear created in the society

by the subsequent juntas and takeovers has shaped Turkish history to a great extent. The military juntas committed many human rights violations in the name of establishing public order and security by oppressing people they regarded as a threat to their authority. The prisons around the country have become symbol of mass-scale atrocities, Ulucanlar being one of them.

Ulucanlar is an important prison in Turkish political history as it served as the first detention centre for military juntas who silenced every kind of dissident by jailing them there. Not only prominent politicians, who are still actively taking part in politics, but many politically oriented people also stayed there until very recently, such as prime ministers, party leaders, MPs, writers, poets, artists, university students etc, experiencing the worst kinds of torture, segregation, repression, sexual harassment, psychological torture and many more.

In the 2000s, Turkey went through a libertarian period it had never experienced before with the brand-new party AKP (Justice and Development Party) coming to power. The decade was marked with an emphasis on rights, liberties and democratisation which were promoted and promised with a human rights discourse adopted by the government. The human right discourse was accompanied by a confrontation discourse embraced to tackle the military tutelage which was claimed to be the biggest obstacle in front of democratisation. As a result, substantial steps were taken in the form of a wide range of reforms and regulations such as abolishment of the death penalty, establishment of a parliamentary coup research commission, expansion of individual rights and liberties as well as criminal prosecutions of the coup leaders with the desire and motivation of getting full membership of the European Union (EU). As a part of a series of confrontation attempts, Ulucanlar Prison Museum (UPM) is the product of this relatively democratic period which created a momentum in confrontation demands and pursuit of justice by civil society. Like the groundbreaking reforms undertaken one after another in legal, legislative levels and individual rights and liberties, this was a step of equal significance in Turkey which is full of notorious prisons of this kind, standing as the monuments of state violence and with a lot to reveal about them.

UPM claims to be an example of the memorial museum genre which is a globally rising trend. Apart from serving as a symbolic reparation for those whose human rights have been violated, memorial museums, as a vehicle to confront and acknowledge a negative past, are created

with the rationale of linking the heritage of the past with the present in a democratisation process to promote human rights, enable social reconciliation and to give the message Never again to the upcoming generations. As key places where gross human rights violations took place during oppressive regimes, prisons as memory sites can convey this message vividly to the visitors, and thus transforming them into museums seems a worthwhile initiative. However, the politics behind the museums can undermine the message they try to convey from both the victims' and visitors' perspectives. Therefore, examining the impact the museum has on the visitors and prisoners can shed light on its contribution to transmitting the legacy of the past, serving as a reparation for the victims, providing a healing and societal reconciliation and promotion of human rights and democratic values.

Having been a part of an increasing demand and interest from both victims and visitors around the world, memorial museums are highly influential thanks to the power they derive from their authority as truth holders and emotional places attracting visitors in an unprecedented scale. Their role and function thus are crucial in that the impact they have might serve to promote human rights or undermine it, paving the way for hatred and further division.

Different from many states which underwent military regimes such as Latin American countries, Turkey has not undertaken a transitional justice process to come to terms with its past but instead adopted a proto-transition<sup>1</sup> with a number of reforms and regulations accompanied by a promise for confrontation. Even though important steps were taken, the achievements turned out to be procedural rather than substantial,<sup>2</sup> contributing little to strengthening democracy which is already fragile. On the contrary, the period of freedom has been followed immediately by a decade plagued with state violence, ethnic division, armed conflict, authoritarianism and corruption on an unprecedented scale. The failed coup attempt of 15 July 2015 proved that the cyclical pattern, in which a democratic decade is followed by a military takeover or intervention, was not broken and Turkey has fallen into chaos once again.

Therefore, UPM, as a memorialisation initiative of an era marked with a confrontation discourse which is highly contested, is worth

<sup>1</sup> Yeliz Budak, 'Dealing with the Past: Transitional Justice, Ongoing Conflict and the Kurdish Issue in Turkey' (2015) 9 *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 219, 232.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid* 229.

examining as it has the potential to shed light on the circumstances it was born into; the social and political framework it is located in; and the politics practiced in the representational level. It is equally important to examine its contribution to transmitting the legacy of the past, its potential to bring individual and societal healing and reconciliation, and finally its capacity to promote human rights in a society which is already divided deeply ethnically and politically.

However, this is not all. The historical and political significance of the museum lies in the very fact that it has created a momentum for an increasing spatial awareness in Turkey which has turned into a political ground on which a battle against government's implementations is fought and which has been crystallised in the protests of national-scale such as Gezi Park protests. Thus, the first of its kind, the museum, has drawn the attentions to other trauma places such as Madımak Hotel, Diyarbakır Prison, Mamak Military Prison and Metris Prison with an increasing demand for their transformations into memory spaces; and has become a threshold for the sincerity test of the confrontation discourse. For this very reason, assessing Ulucanlar as a memorial museum and revealing the dynamics behind its transformation process and the politics implemented in its creation is significant in that the findings might illuminate other memorialisation attempts in Turkey. Moreover, laying down the impact it has had on people might give an idea on the capacity of a memorial space in Turkey to promise a reconciliation for a society which is deeply polarised and divided.

Today, it is a well-known fact, at least by civil society, that the museum was instrumentalised by the government to serve its political agenda which was marked with a confrontation discourse at that time and that it is highly political. However, this has not resonated in academic studies until very recently. The observations I made over several visits to the museum inspired me to come up with an idea to write about Ulucanlar. It was the removal of the picture of a dissident ex-prisoner Sırrı Süreyya Önder that I noticed in one of my visits there which gave me the inspiration.<sup>3</sup> On my last visit to the museum to conduct my interviews, I had a chance to observe the museum and track the further changes in the form of omissions and additions and make a semiological reading of the representation of the museum.

<sup>3</sup> Upon my disclosure of this to one of the ex-prisoners during the interview, the removal of Sırrı Süreyya Önder's photo from the museum became national news, creating a huge discussion.

However, to my surprise, towards the end of my own study, I found out that a master's thesis had been written on the politics of the UPM by Tuğçe Aysu,<sup>4</sup> in which interviews were conducted with both visitors and ex-prisoners in a similar way. Although at first I was concerned about the authenticity of my own study, I can justify my topic on the grounds that I examined the functionality of Ulucanlar as an example of the memorial museum genre, within the historical context of its creation in the light of human rights and transitional justice as well as museology theories which the mentioned thesis did not touch upon at all. The politics behind the museum is only one part of my overall discussion.

### *1.1.1 Structure*

In the second chapter, the concept of memory is discussed as a social phenomenon within the framework of collective memory theory with a specific focus on the increasing interest in remembering and commemoration, memory boom.

The third chapter touches upon the museum as an institutionalised form of remembering; and the genre of memorial museum which has evolved as a result of the memory boom, with a specific focus on the truth and feelings. The relationship between memory and space is discussed in the context of prisons and the instrumentalisation of memory as a political tool has been laid down.

In chapter four, the relationship between memory and human rights is discussed which is crystallised with the legacy of the Holocaust. Then, the role and the function of memory within the transitional justice theory is discussed to give a detailed account on how memory has come to serve as a reparation for the victims and as a ground on which truth, justice and accountability are pursued.

Chapter five gives an overview of the historical and political context of Turkey. The democratic life interrupted by many military takeovers has been laid down to illustrate the scale of the state violence and to provide a better comprehension of the confrontation demands by the civil society and the grassroots activism. Similarly, the historical context of the 2000s, which was marked with the EU membership process, was

<sup>4</sup> Tuğçe Aysu, 'Turning Ulucanlar Prison to Ulucanlar Prsion Museum: The Politics of Creating a Memory Place' (Istanbul Bilgi University 2015).



presented to show the dynamics behind the confrontation discourse adopted by the government, as a result of which UPM emerged.

In the sixth chapter, UPM is analysed in the light of the contested transformation process and semiological reading of the museum in representational and structural level to reveal the politics behind it. Following this, the data collected from the ex-prisoners and museum visitors has been analysed in terms of the questions asked.

## 1.2 METHODOLOGY

The approach applied in this study can be said to fit best to multi-modal ethnography. It includes a ‘multi-semiotic form in which meaning is produced through the inter-relationship between and among different media and modes’.<sup>5</sup> This approach is preferred as the present study made use of different ways to collect the necessary data. They are:

- semi-structured, in-depth face-to face interviews (with civil society representatives, ex-prisoners, museum visitors);
- email interviews (with ex-prisoners);
- observation of the museum and semiological reading of the representation in the museum; and
- historical texts and newspapers.

In the first category, I interviewed Tezcan Candan, the chairperson of the Ankara Chamber of Architects (TMMOB), who was actively involved in the transformation process of the museum. I did not have specific questions for her as she told me about the process from the beginning to the end as a first-hand witness which shed light on the politics behind the transformation process. I benefited from the newspapers to refer to the specific cases she was pointing to.

At the beginning of the study, my aim was to understand the function of the museum just from the visitors’ perspectives. Then I thought the data I would get from ex-prisoners’ experience with the museum would provide much more insight on the politics and the functionality of the museum. However, I had a disadvantage of distance. So I posted

<sup>5</sup> Bella Dicks, Bambo Soyinka and Amanda Coffey, ‘Multimodal Ethnography’ (2006) 6 *Qualitative Research* 77, 78.

on Twitter that I need to talk to people who stayed in Ulucanlar and who had a chance to visit it as a museum. To my surprise, many people responded, my call went viral. People were so enthusiastic about either sharing their own memories or giving a friend's or a relative's name which, in my opinion, is meaningful in the context of the present study to show the interest in memory. An ex-prisoner, Nergiz Uzun, contacted me and provided me with other persons' names whom she knew from the prison. Thanks to her network, I interviewed nine ex-prisoners in Ankara where the prison is located. As I reached out to the prisoners on the basis of their acquaintances, I could not find prisoners from other political orientations neither have I been able to find more than one woman. A right-wing prisoner, whom I tried to contact via his daughter, refused to talk to me.

The interviews, which lasted between 25 to 55 minutes, were surrounded around 4 questions I asked but the interviewees were not limited by them and shared their memories as much as they remembered. The questions are prepared in an attempt to examine the claims and missions of Ulucanlar, as a memorial museum; the way it reflects the legacy of the memory of its survivors; the emotional outcome it had on the survivors; the way the museum fulfils its missions as a symbolic reparation and finally survivors' perception of a memory place in a post-conflict society. The data has been analysed in the framework provided by the questions and interpreted in the light of the collective memory theory, human rights approach and Turkish historical context.

In addition to face-to-face interviews, one of the ex-prisoners wanted to contribute to my study via e-mail. He gave written answers to my questions.

For the last category, I talked to 32 visitors aged 16-62. The interviewees were chosen randomly, on the basis of voluntary participation. I waited at the exit of the museum and asked for volunteers. Although I managed to reach out many people, the interviews were shorter than I expected (two-ten minutes) as people were intimidated and unwilling to say much out of the fear of being critical of the government (which might result in prosecution). People were suspicious of my identity, my aim of the interviews and my study. I clarified that I was doing an academic research for which just their observations were needed but not their personal information. Despite my clarification, some of them were not satisfied and refused to talk. Others did want to participate yet insisted on not being publicised, which again I think is meaningful for this study.

I had planned to examine the visitor reactions to the museum from several points yet I anticipated the risk of overall and generic responses from people. So, I determined four themes according to which I prepared my questions: the motivation for visiting, the educational role of the museum, the feeling it created and finally the message the visitors got from the museum. Although the questions are open-ended, some of the respondents needed follow-up questions or clarification to elaborate. The data has been analysed in the light of collective memory theory, human rights approach and Turkish historical context.

Apart from the interviews, I benefited from documentaries made by one of the prisoners and by TMMOB; online newspapers; museum publications; bulletin and oral history book made by TMMOB; and historical texts on the recent Turkish history.

2.

COLLECTIVE MEMORY THEORY

2.1 MEMORY AS A SOCIAL PHENOMENON

Memory has subjective and biological connotations. However, memory as a collective phenomenon was first touched upon by Maurice Halbwachs who theorised it within the field of sociology and coined the term 'collective memory'<sup>6</sup>. Indeed, no memory study can be made without first mentioning Halbwachs as he is the first scholar to discuss it as a social phenomenon. However, in doing so, what Halbwachs did actually was build upon Emile Durkheim's theory of collective effervescence.<sup>7</sup> Durkheim, a collectivist sociologist, asserted that there is something personified in people's gathering which creates an electricity and excitement which transcends the individual.<sup>8</sup> For him, it is the collective effervescence which creates the ties binding the community together, which, during the calm phases, are crystallised in the collective material or physical representations such as rituals or art works.<sup>9</sup>

However, the question of what unifies the community in the cases where those physical/material references are missing remains unanswered in Durkheim's account, which according to Coser, was an important gap filled by Halbwachs: he claimed that the gap between the period of effervescence and ordinary life is filled with collective memory.<sup>10</sup> Taking Durkheim's concept as a starting point for his theory,

<sup>6</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Lewis A Coser (ed), University of Chicago Press 1992).

<sup>7</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (The Free Press 1995).

<sup>8</sup> *ibid* 217-218.

<sup>9</sup> Lewis A Coser, 'Introduction', *Maurice Halbwachs: On Collective Memory* (The University of Chicago Press 1992) 25.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*.

Halbwachs combined it with Henri Bergson's notions on memory, who emphasises subjectivity as a reaction to the dominant objectivist and rationalist approaches of his era, asserting that memory is the central feature of experiencing the time.<sup>11</sup> The emphasis on the subjectivity in Bergson finds its way through making a meaningful connections with the past<sup>12</sup> with the most subjective unit of human being: the memory.<sup>13</sup> Memory, for Bergson, is thus fluid and variable.<sup>14</sup>

The two mentioned aspects of memory, the subjectivity and collectivity, constitute Halbwachs' theory's main points. For him it is the individual who remembers but this act of remembering finds its context in the society in which the individual is located.<sup>15</sup> In other words, the remembrance happens in individual sphere but it is the society or a group which gives it a certain framework. Halbwachs argues that 'memory needs others'.<sup>16</sup>

A short literature review on memory will show that much of the academic production is devoted to arguing the validity of the Halbwachsian approach to the field. There are long discussions on how memory as an individual biological unit cannot have social aspects or how the theory is hypothetical in regarding the society as a living, homogenous organism in Durkheimian sense. However, Halbwachs is aware that the cognitive act of remembrance is totally individual just like thinking and he makes the difference between the objective and subjective natures of remembering by attributing the first to the 'historical memory'<sup>17</sup> and the latter to an 'individual' one: for him collective memory includes the concepts which are different from those of history.<sup>18</sup> He argues that remembering a set of dates from past events is totally different from recalling shared lived past experiences from first-hand. In his approach, the objective memory which is transcendental,<sup>19</sup> is a 'standardized and uniform way of recording the time'<sup>20</sup> and thus

<sup>11</sup> Jeffrey K Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Daniel Levy (eds), *The Collective Memory Reader* (OUP 2011) 17.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Halbwachs (n 6) 53.

<sup>16</sup> Coser (n 9) 34.

<sup>17</sup> Amos Funkenstein, 'Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness' (1989) 1 *History and Memory* 5, 9-10.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Levy (n 11) 17.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*

stands in a direct opposition with the subjective memory which is variable, fluid and fragmented.

The very nature of memory as a social phenomenon, also, points to one of the indicators of a group identity. According to Halbwachs, a shared past creates a shared memory which binds the group together and thus it creates an identity. That, by all means, would mean that every group has its own memory and so ‘memory is multiple’.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, having a closer look at a specific memory would give an idea about the social framework the group members are settled in, their ‘shared’ history and the dynamics of the group identity.

## 2.2 THE TENSION BETWEEN MEMORY AND HISTORY: THE SHIFT FROM SEMANTIC TO EPISODIC MEMORIES

Nicholas Russell takes this distinction between historical-objective and personal-subjective memory made by Halbwachs and takes it further by comparing it with the distinction made on memory by recent cognitive scientists. According to this model, there are three type of memories in the personal sphere: procedural, semantic and episodic memories.<sup>22</sup> Procedural memory is related to the skills, such as driving, and it is outside of the scope of the present discussion. Semantic memory, on the other hand, is a kind of ‘storage of abstract information and facts’.<sup>23</sup> This has nothing to do with personal lived experiences. Episodic memory, however, is remembrance of the personal lived experiences and it is reconstruction of the past on the individual level.<sup>24</sup>

Russell resembles the semantic memory to that of modern collective memory: it is out there, remembered by everyone, and functions as an abstract information without being linked to any specific group or identity. However, Halbwachsian collective memory, according to this analysis, is pretty much episodic in that it is based on a group’s lived experiences which ties them up and gives them an identity. Drawing the parallelism between the early distinction made by Halbwachs and the

<sup>21</sup> Pierre Nora, ‘Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire’ (1989) 26 Representations 7, 9.

<sup>22</sup> Nicolas Russell, ‘Collective Memory before and after Halbwachs’ (2014) 79 The French Review 792.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid* 798.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid*.

recent cognitive conceptualisations, Russel builds his argument on the fact that the 20th century is more interested in episodic memory and its dynamics which is characterised by a movement called memory boom.<sup>25</sup>

Before making a comparison between the 19th and 20th century memory approaches, the above-mentioned distinction might be enlightening in understanding the ‘tension between history and memory’.<sup>26</sup> Pierre Nora’s highly quoted and inspirational conceptualisation of memory and history dichotomy is very close to the Halbwachsian approach. He agrees with Halbwachs in the fact that memory is ‘multiple and yet specific; collective, plural and yet individual’.<sup>27</sup> Nora depicts memory as a vivid phenomenon and a living organism which is:

borne by living societies founded in its name; (...) in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived.<sup>28</sup>

According to this approach, memory is not only genuine but also a phenomenon in the constant making which helps people relate themselves to the ‘eternal present’.<sup>29</sup> Without doubt, this refers to the link memory creates between past and the future which gives a meaning to our present. It is thanks to memory that we make sense out of our own existence and create meaningful bonds with our society.

On the contrary, for Nora, history is a mere ‘representation of the past’<sup>30</sup> which is why, it is a reconstruction which is never complete and always thorny. Moreover, what it looks for is ‘analysis and criticism’<sup>31</sup> therefore, it fits in the intellectual sphere, not belonging to a specific group thus lacking authenticity. At the heart of this dichotomy between history and memory lies the fact that ‘history is suspicious of memory and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it’.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Russel (n 22) 798.

<sup>26</sup> Nora (n 21).

<sup>27</sup> *ibid* 9.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid* 8.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid* 9.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*.

### 2.3 AN INCREASING ATTENTION TO THE COMMEMORATION AND MEMORY: MEMORY BOOM

Russel's conceptualisation might help us understand the shift from the triumphant memory<sup>33</sup> of the 19th century – an era which was obsessed with historiography – to the apologetic memory of the late 20th century, an era which is traumatised with the destruction of World War II (WWII) and which takes the Holocaust as its milestone.

Amy Sodaro makes the comparison of 19th and 20th centuries in terms of monuments and memorials. According to this comparison, the 19th century was dominated with nation-building motivated memory practicing. The monuments and memorials are built in a celebratory, triumphant way to point out a nation's heroic past in an attempt to create a group identity. The message which is tried to be given with those structures is often positive and it is the future what matters. More importantly, it is an era of forgetting as much as remembering as the latter is a 'crucial factor in the creation of a nation'.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, the 20th century is marked with totalitarian regimes which used the past as an ideological tool towards a progressive future based on their present needs. Monuments in this era are massive, numerous, manipulative and hegemonic. And in the very similar way, forgetting characterises the atrocities of this oppressive regimes in the form of rewriting and manipulating of the history.<sup>35</sup>

It can be argued that these two types of remembering fit the semantic memory conceptualisation of Russell's. They are selective, future oriented, impersonal, celebratory and triumphant. However, the late 20th century marks an era in which faith in modernity and progressivism were shattered with the massive destructions of WWII and thus these traditional forms of remembrance are not functional in addressing the past traumas.<sup>36</sup> The shift has been from semantic memory to an episodic one, leading to an era characterised by individual memories and histories to such an extent that the term memory boom has been coined to define it.

<sup>33</sup> Amy Sodaro, *Exhibiting Atrocity: Memorial Museums and the Politics of Past Violence* (Rutgers UP 2018) 21.

<sup>34</sup> Ernest Renan, *What Is a Nation? And Other Political Writings - Ernest Renan - Google Books* (Columbia UP 2018).

<sup>35</sup> Sodaro (n 33).

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*



Memory has been the focus of a huge body of various genres such as movies, documentaries, TV series, books, journals; memory spaces and memorial museums and even civil society organisations aimed at confronting the past violence.<sup>37</sup> An issue of such popularity has surely attracted the academia to analyse the dynamics and the effects of this form of new remembrance which is past-oriented, confrontational and victim-centred are thus totally different from the previous forms.

In an attempt to try to explain this increasing interest in memory, many scholars claim that it is very much related to the Holocaust.<sup>38</sup> According to this claim, the Holocaust was the turning point or even a breaking point in history which embodies the fallen narrative of modernism: a systematic destruction of human by human in the most brutal way. Being left with a horrible legacy by WWII, the late 20th century individual has shifted the way it related to the past: from glorifying and celebrating it to confront it.

Memory boom has been linked with the legacy of the Holocaust to a great extent. Nora claims that 'Whoever says memory, says Shoah'.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Andreas Huyssen confirms this remark by stating that memory discourses started in 1960s in the West with an impulse to 'search for alternative and revisionist histories' and were accelerated in 1980 with the TV series Holocaust.<sup>40</sup> It is obvious that the media contributed a great deal to the creation of representations of the Holocaust and to convey it to a broad audience. What had been known about the Holocaust so far were now accompanied by a set of images and iconography different from the previous autobiographic memories as Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder<sup>41</sup> claim. When genocide is spoken, what I picture is the imagery I saw in the black and white film *Schindler's List* by Steven Spielberg. It is the way I codified the Holocaust in my perception, so did people around the world. Therefore, it is not hard to guess the impact of those movies in the earlier formation of the Holocaust memory universally. Levy and Sznajder further claim that this very period of 'iconographic formation of the Holocaust',<sup>42</sup> between 1960s and 1980s, made people focus on the past with future concerns, that is to say, the Holocaust started to be considered

<sup>37</sup> Sodaro (n 33) 14.

<sup>38</sup> Andreas Huyssen, 'Present Pasts: Media, Politics, Amnesia' (2000) 12 *Globalization* 21.

<sup>39</sup> 'Shoah' is a 1985 documentary film by Claude Lanzmann which tells the story of the Holocaust based on interviews conducted with victims, witnesses and perpetrators.

<sup>40</sup> Huyssen (n 38) 22.

<sup>41</sup> Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder, 'Memory Unbound' (2007) 5 *European Journal of Social Theory* 87, 95.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid* 95.

as something happened to Jews, however, it is out there with a possibility to happen to everyone anytime.<sup>43</sup>

This is the point where memory and human rights meet. The Holocaust did not only energise the public attention to the memory of the past atrocities of WWII, but it also formed the setting for a ‘universal human rights regime’.<sup>44</sup> Levy and Sznajder claim that the Holocaust constitutes the breaking point in the history where the perception of the human as a vulnerable being was comprehended to the fullest, an awakening which gave birth to an existential concern in a universal scale. It is this concern which enabled a shift in the source of state legitimacy to human rights principles after 1945.<sup>45</sup> According to this claim, the states started to seek legitimacy in both national and international level by addressing the human rights abuses took place in WWII, in other words, the memory of the Holocaust.

Memory narrative has started with the memory of the Holocaust as stated above however, the late 20th century has experienced memory in its broadest sense. According to Huyssen, this has not only taken place in the realm of the media, but also a huge body of literature with a specific focus on the trauma, in urban spaces and heritages and even in fashion and furniture. But more importantly, memory narrative has been the major characteristic or catalyst as the language of human rights and universal political agenda in this era: In the 1990s, with the dissolution of communism in central Europe and post-Soviet countries, it is with the mediation of the memory of the oppressive regimes that the societies dealt with their legacies. Similarly, with the fall of apartheid, justice was sought with the memory in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. It was memory of the past atrocities of the military regimes with which justice was claimed in Latin America. And it is the memory of the Holocaust which resonated in Rwanda and Kosovo as well.<sup>46</sup> In sum, memory has been ‘omnipresent’<sup>47</sup> throughout the 20th century either as a tool to confront the past and claim justice; as a bond with which a victim identity was established; or as haunting reminder of former genocidal practices in Kosovo.

<sup>43</sup> Levy and Sznajder (n 41) 96.

<sup>44</sup> Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder, ‘Remembering a Sociology of Human Rights’ (2014) 3 *Culture & History Digital Journal* (CSIC-CCHS) 1, 3.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Huyssen (n 38) 25-26.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*

## 3.

## MEMORY, SPATIALITY AND POLITICS OF REMEMBRANCE

## 3.1 MUSEUMS AND AUTHORITY

There is an unquestionable authority intrinsic to museums which is familiar to all of us. The source of this authority goes back to the ancient Greek from where the name derives. According to Simmons, the concept and name of the museum comes from ancient Greek, *mouseion*, used to describe a temple which is devoted to muses who are goddesses of inspiration and artistic creation. *Mouseion*, in ancient Greek, was a sacred place, an institution for philosophical contemplation and education.<sup>48</sup>

As places where history was produced and exhibited, museums consolidated their authority in the 19th century as a state apparatus with a number of purposes such as education, surveillance and civilising.<sup>49</sup> Building his theory on Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*,<sup>50</sup> Tony Bennett claims that the emergence of museums parallels the emergence of the prison as a public institution, as an exercise of power by the state: as a place for punishment, a prison was separated from the public sphere – contrary to its visibility in the 18th century – whereas a museum emerged as a new form of public display by bringing knowledge and power from private (collections) to the public domain.<sup>51</sup> This means

<sup>48</sup> John E Simmons, *Museums: A History* (Rowman & Littlefield 2016) 1 <[https://books.google.com.tr/books?id=wCFsDAAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=museums+a+history&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewi\\_hYu-4r\\_JAhWNFMAKHQzvBG0Q6AEIKTAA#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com.tr/books?id=wCFsDAAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=museums+a+history&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewi_hYu-4r_JAhWNFMAKHQzvBG0Q6AEIKTAA#v=onepage&q&f=false)> accessed 10 November 2019.

<sup>49</sup> Tony Bennett, 'The Exhibitionary Context' (1988) 4 Spring I 988 *New Formations* 73 <[http://banmarchive.org.uk/collections/newformations/04\\_73.pdf](http://banmarchive.org.uk/collections/newformations/04_73.pdf)> accessed 7 November 2019.

<sup>50</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Vintage Books 1995).

<sup>51</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (Routledge 1995) 94.

that museums became spaces where the states not only established their historical narrative and identity, but also controlled mobs and educated them. From the position of ordinary people, it is the place where they encountered and had close contact with power thus they needed self-regulation. What Bennett tries to underline with this approach is that museums derive their authority partly from these masses who turned to 'voluntary self-regulatory citizenry'.<sup>52</sup>

However, this is not the whole story. Having the control of the historical truth and knowledge, museums retained their authority and power until very recently. Knell states that museums were regarded as 'neutral, authoritative and trustworthy'<sup>53</sup> in the public eye until the 1980s, after which there was a shift in the strategies used in the ways of representation. Therefore, the keywords to describe museums in the cultural sphere have shifted as well, from hegemony to negotiation in relation to the ways museums relate to the public.<sup>54</sup> The dynamics behind the mentioned shift has a lot to do with the shift from historiography to memory for sure. But this does not mean that the trust and reliance on the museums have weakened. On the contrary, museums are still a reliable source of knowledge and truth for many people. According to a recent survey conducted by the Institute for Museum and Library Services in 2015, museums are rated 4.62 on a scale of 5 on trustworthiness.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, history museums and museums were rated 6.7 on a scale of 10 as a more trustworthy source of information than researchers and professors, local papers and even the government in America.<sup>56</sup>

Where do the museums derive this authority despite the mentioned shift then? One idea is that museums are trustworthy as they present the facts and truths in unmediated ways, in the form of collections.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Bennett (n 49) 76.

<sup>53</sup> Simon Knell, 'National Museums and the National Imagination' in Simon Knell and others (eds), *National Museums: New Studies Around the World* (Routledge Taylor & Francis Group 2011) 4.

<sup>54</sup> Victoria Cain, 'Review : Exhibitionary Complexity : Reconsidering Museums ' Cultural Authority' (2008) 60 *American Quarterly* 1143, 1144.

<sup>55</sup> José-marie Griffiths and Donald W King, 'InterConnections: The IMLS National Study on the Use of Libraries, Museums and the Internet: Museum Survey Results' (2008) <<https://informalscience.org/sites/default/files/IMLSMusRpt20080312kjm.pdf>> accessed 18 November 2019.

<sup>56</sup> American Alliance of Museums, 'Museums: Did you know?' <[ww2.aam-us.org/docs/default-source/advocacy/infographic-2-pg-color.pdf?sfvrsn=4](http://ww2.aam-us.org/docs/default-source/advocacy/infographic-2-pg-color.pdf?sfvrsn=4)> accessed 27 April 2019.

<sup>57</sup> Elizabeth Merritt, 'Trust Me I Am a Museum' (Center for the Future of Museums Blog, 3 February 2015) <<https://aam-us.org/2015/02/03/trust-me-im-a-museum/>> accessed 27 April 2019.

That said, the audience may not realise that the collections exhibited are done so on the basis of selection but still the unmediated, immediate presence of artefacts carries a kind of authority with them as evidence of the past, a feature called as ‘material truth’<sup>58</sup> by Zwick. Zwick argues that no matter how controversial they are, the genuineness of the material evidences is not contested.<sup>59</sup> They are directly linked to the past events and persons bearing their memory. Similarly, Hartman states that a picture can speak for itself more than words thanks to the illusions of immediacy and self-evidence.<sup>60</sup>

Another idea is that the authority of museums, in the past, was not only about expertise but also control over the access to the collections. Now that there is a shift from control to negotiation and museums have been democratised, the source of authority is still the ‘command over knowledge’.<sup>61</sup> We still live in an era in which knowledge is attributed with a high degree of power and authority and for this very reason, museums are still truth holders for many of us. Any dishonesty would be a ‘breach of faith’ as Susan A Crane says because we have a deep faith in museums as we do not rely on our ‘fallible’ memories.<sup>62</sup>

### 3.2 MEMORIAL MUSEUMS AS A NEW FORM OF REMEMBRANCE: TRUTH HOLDERS AND EMOTIONAL PLACES

As a part of the memory boom, a new form of museum has emerged, which dates back to the second half of the 20th century: memorial museums. Accelerated with the media, the visibility and popularity of these museums have increased so much that they have started to attract contemporary mobile individuals from all around the world to a degree that a new term has come into use to describe this obsession: ‘dark tourism’.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Tamara Zwick, ‘Memroy and the Mississippi: The Authority of Artifacts at Auschwitz-Birkenau’ (1995) 15 *UCLA Historical Journal* 93, 95.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Geoffrey H Hartman, ‘Public Memory and Modern Experience’ [1993] 6 *Yale Journal of Criticism* 242.

<sup>61</sup> Sarah Longair, ‘Cultures of Curating: The Limits of Authority’ (2015) 8 *Museum History Journal* 1.

<sup>62</sup> Susan A Crane, ‘Memory , Distortion, and History in the Museum’ (1997) 36 *History and Theory: Theme Issue 36: Producing the Past: Making Histories Inside and Outside the Academy* 44, 51.

<sup>63</sup> Malcolm Foley and J John Lennon, ‘JFK and Dark Tourism: A Fascination with Assassination’ (1996) 2 *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 198.

The proliferation and popularisation of memorial museums has much to do with the above mentioned tension between history and memory. With the destruction of master narratives of the 20th century, memory has stepped on the stage as a concept loaded with the sufferings and pains of modernism which, according to Silke Arnold de-Simine, has weakened the hegemonic existence of historiography against memory, rendering it as ‘villain’ and ‘elitist’ which tries to suppress alternative narratives.<sup>64</sup> It is this shift which went beyond the theoretical realm, influencing the cultural domain as well, giving birth to a new form of museum.

Indeed, memorial museums, as a new type, are the embodiment of the abovementioned tension and shift. Memorial museums, as a new genre, differ from the traditional concept of museum in terms of the missions attributed to it. As the ‘crucial cultural apparatus of modernity’,<sup>65</sup> the museum used to be thought of as a place of public education with a certain degree of authority ascribed to it. However, memorial museums have adopted additional missions with totally different strategies. It preserves the role of facilitating public education, not on the basis of exhibiting collections and artefacts with historical significance, but by putting difficult and traumatic pasts under the lens of memories through which the visitors are invited to reflect on the present. The mission then takes a new form: a social formation on the basis of recognition of individuals and groups as ‘subjects of rights’<sup>66</sup> and thus promotion of democratic values and human rights. To do so, the strategies applied have transformed from a mere exhibition of the collections of the artefacts to performative, experiential and theatrical policies. Taking the commemoration of the victims of a specific trauma to its centre, the new museums take form of a public space with experience-based learning, confrontation and commemoration. For this very reason, Paul Williams names this new type as a ‘novel hybrid’:<sup>67</sup> a specific kind of museum which presents a historical event in the framework of commemorating a mass suffering with a designated mission for social transformation.

<sup>64</sup> Silke Arnold-de-Simine, *Mediating Memory in the Museum - Trauma, Empathy, Nostalgia* (Plagrave Macmillan 2013) 17.

<sup>65</sup> Jens Andermann and Silke Arnold-de Simine, ‘Memory, Community and the New Museum’ (2012) 29 *Theory, Culture & Society* 3, 4.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid* 6.

<sup>67</sup> Paul Harvey Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (Berg 2007) 1.

There are dozens of different definitions and descriptions of memorial museums in the memory literature. Instead of making an all-inclusive, thorough definition here, drawing the common characteristics of them would be illuminating as our case study on UPM will be analysed on the basis of these elements and characteristics which are shared by an increasing number of memorial museums around the world today.

One very important element is victim-centredness. The focus and emphasis are on the victims and their sufferings either on the basis of personal narratives or collective form. The victim is presented as a subject whose rights were violated by the state. A victim-centred framework carries, without doubt, a triumphant feature, which creates state versus victim antagonism: different from what has actually happened to them, the victims are not marginalised in the context of the museum but stand there with pride with which we are invited to identify. This said, the message given is that the individual is empowered against the state power, no matter if s/he is the victim or the witness.

Empathy, as another common element, is what is intended to be generated in the visitors of the museum through victim-centredness. It is generally assumed that empathy encourages critical thinking which then can be turned into a deeper understanding and tolerance<sup>68</sup> and produce solidarity between different ethnic, national, religious or political groups. Indeed, empathy is the very key concept of the memorial museums, as it happens in the realm of feelings, an element which differentiates memorial museums from the objective, impersonal and traditional museology. This new form of museum is based on feelings as one of the core values underlying its existence.

Remembering takes places in a moral framework in memorial museums. Landsberg states that 'with memory comes a sense of obligation and responsibility; remembering is a moral injunction'.<sup>69</sup> The motto **Never again** of the Holocaust, which has become a universal catchphrase for all kind of mass atrocities happening around the world, resonates a promise to not to allow these violations happen again by making a call for undertaking a responsibility to protect and promote human rights. This is where memory and human rights intersect: it is the memory of the traumatic past which loads the responsibility on the

<sup>68</sup> Arnold-de-Simine (n 64) 46.

<sup>69</sup> Alison Landsberg, 'Response' (2007) 11 *Rethinking History* 627, 628.

shoulders of the visitors who have been turned into witnesses with the experience they have in the memorial museum. Witnessing comes with a responsibility to protect and defend human rights and it also empowers the visitors by turning them into active participants in empathising and identifying with victims; and into agents to take action. Apart from this, there is a moral value intrinsic to bearing witness in that it is an expression of our alliance with the good or the right and rejection of the bad and the wrong as Blustein argues.<sup>70</sup> In sum, by remembering we can have a moral stance against violence and human rights violations.

### 3.3 PRISONS AS MEMORY SPACES: SPATIALITY OF MEMORY

According to Michel Foucault, punishment used to take place in the form of public spectacle and execution before the 18th century, after which it has turned into confinement in a state apparatus: prison.<sup>71</sup> The emergence of prison points out to the shift in the way punishment took place: a shift from public display to a remote and enclosed confinement. A space of punishment and discipline, prisons served as a state apparatus in the modern states.

This remoteness and seclusion put prisons in a crucial place in the human rights context. The human rights at stake –within the prison context – are numerous but prisons are generally associated with torture and killing, which are the subject of two rights which are not derogable even in extraordinary situations. Still, since their emergence as a state apparatus for punishment and discipline, prisons have been perfect places for state violence. And military regimes, specifically, are the periods during which the mentioned human rights abuses reach a peak, under a veil of impunity.

As places of atrocities of oppressive regimes, what prisons can tell about them, how they can serve in the new museology concept mentioned above and what values they can add in confrontation with the legacy of human rights abuses all point to crucial aspects of prisons as museums: their spatiality.

<sup>70</sup> Jeffrey Blustein, *The Moral Demands of Memory* (Cambridge UP 2008) 337.

<sup>71</sup> Foucault (n 50).



David Morris argues that memory is not only an internal concept, but it is also harboured in places and things beyond us such as building and architecture.<sup>72</sup> According to his claim, there is an intimacy between memory and places and memory takes a spatial form with the architecture: places bear the legacy of the past, tell stories and become the outer extension of the memory.

Spatiality in this sense would mean authenticity which is intrinsic to all historical places and which, according to what Faithe McCreery quoted from G. Ashworth and George Hartmann, creates a perception in the visitors that visiting these places is more meaningful than visiting other museums.<sup>73</sup> Thinking of prisons as memory spaces within the context of the newly emerged form of remembrance – memorial museums – their spatiality can be claimed to be a surplus value as it adds more to the authenticity they claim as museums. As previously argued, authenticity is an unmediated form of memory and it is one aspect which reinforces the authority of the museum.

Aleida Assmann explains the power of authenticity with the concept of *antaeic magic*,<sup>74</sup> which she borrowed from Aby Warburg.<sup>75</sup> According to this concept, historical places have the potential to make the past palpable:<sup>76</sup> by visiting them one can experience the feeling and gain insight about the past which would be impossible to get by merely reading about it. The past is vivid, concrete and touchable during this direct, immediate and unmediated encounter which is why it is magical. The power of the historical site resides in its authenticity as Susan Knittel argues, luring the visitors into experiencing the past personally with an attempt which goes beyond learning about the historical facts which the site can exhibit.<sup>77</sup> In other words, the aura of the physical space and the feeling it creates in the visitors go beyond the story it tells, which is the case especially with the trauma sites.

<sup>72</sup> David Morris, 'Spatiality, Temporality, and Architecture as a Place of Memory' in Patricia M Locke and Rachel Mccann (eds), *Merleau-Ponty: Space, Place, Architecture* (Ohio UP 2015) 109.

<sup>73</sup> Faithe McCreery, 'Interpreting Incarceration: How Historical Prison Museums Are Addressing the Social Aspects of Criminal Justice' (University of Washington 2015) 27.

<sup>74</sup> Aleida Assmann, *Der Lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* (C.H. Beck 2006) 223.

<sup>75</sup> Susanne C Knittel, *The Historical Uncanny: Disability, Ethnicity, and the Politics of Holocaust Memory* (Fordham UP 2015) 49.

<sup>76</sup> Mattias Ekman, 'Architecture for the Nation's Memory: History, Art, and the Halls of Norway's National Gallery' in Suzanne MacLeod, Laura Hourston Hanks and Jonathan Hale (eds), *Museum Making: Narratives, Architectures, Exhibitions* (Routledge 2012) 146.

<sup>77</sup> Knittel (n 75) 49.

It can be claimed that the above mentioned aura is even stronger when disconnected places such as concentration camps, dungeons, prisons and torture and detention centres are in question. It is this disconnectedness from the social realm which makes them a centre of attraction for those who do not have a first-hand experience in these kinds of places. What is going on behind the closed doors is always a mystery which, once revealed to the public eye, can tell a lot, even with the feelings created during the visit. That is the very reason why the popularity of trauma places has been increasing all around the world giving way to a new trend in travelling: dark tourism. Although there are many criticisms towards dark tourism as a growing industry, it is a phenomenon nowadays; and the motivation to visit the trauma places is this curiosity which Assmann resembles to 'the pilgrim's seeking personal connection to an event in the past'.<sup>78</sup>

### 3.4 THE POLITICS OF REMEMBRANCE

According to Halbwachs, the 'past is a social construction, mainly if not wholly, shaped by the concerns of the present'.<sup>79</sup> In Halbwachsian terms, if the society provides the framework for remembering to take place and if memory is a construction, it is not exempt from power relations in the context it is located in. How to remember; what to remember; in what ways the remembrance takes place and who are to be remembered is a matter of selection which, without doubt, is based on a power struggle of the stakeholders whose interests are concerned. Although it is a struggle over the past, it is highly relevant in the present as 'the past is not necessarily in the past'.<sup>80</sup>

The very nature of memory as something fluid and unsettled makes it vulnerable to many interpretations and manipulations; and memory, thus, is a phenomenon which is never fully complete. Yet it is memory's plurality which makes many other historical accounts possible and valid against monolithic and hegemonic narratives. This is a clear sign of the

<sup>78</sup> Knittel (n 75) 49.

<sup>79</sup> Lewis A Coser, 'Introduction', *Maurice Halbwachs: On Collective Memory* (The University of Chicago Press 1992) 26.

<sup>80</sup> Michelle D Bonner, 'The Politics of Memory in Chile: From Pinochet to Bachelet (Book Review)' (2014) 12 *Perspectives on Politics* by American Political Science Association 939, 940.

fact that there is a ‘deep politics to memory’ and in every era, there is an effort to rebuild it to serve to the various interests of various groups whose socio-economic power is determinant in the memory-making process.<sup>81</sup> To put it in Foucaultian terms, memory is constructed and shaped within power relations just like knowledge, and it serves as the dominant rhetoric circulating in a specific period of time until it is challenged by a counter-narrative. Memory becomes an area of struggle of contrasting narratives of opponents in a never-ending battle.

A critical approach to the memory in the contemporary ‘human rights regime’<sup>82</sup> context shows that the memory is still under the state control yet for different motivations. According to Levy and Sznajder, with the establishment of the human rights regime starting with the Holocaust – at least in the context of Europe – there has been a shift in the source of state sovereignty. Memory of the atrocities of WWII showed that the individuals were vulnerable against the state violence and this gave rise to human rights principles to transcend the state sovereignty: with this shift, states, especially those which are in the democratisation process, started to seek political legitimacy to the extent that they began to confront the past and come to terms with human rights violations. This is necessary for their recognition at the international level.<sup>83</sup> Memory is on the political agenda of the regimes who desire to consolidate their sovereignty both in domestic and international level, being a tool for their contemporary concerns and priority. This means that memory is under the domain of the nation state for their present politics.<sup>84</sup>

However, this is not the whole story as the struggle over memory is not over. Memory is multiple. Against the dominant memory rhetoric, and remembering and forgetting strategies, there are other narratives which come on the stage with challenging claims and accounts: counter-memory. According to George Lipsitz, counter memory ‘looks to the past for the hidden histories excluded from dominant narratives’.<sup>85</sup> It is based on exclusion and silencing by the dominant memory rhetoric,

<sup>81</sup> Katharyne Mitchell, ‘Monuments, Memorials, and the Politics of Memory’ (2003) 24(5) *Urban Geography* 442, 443.

<sup>82</sup> Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder, ‘Remembering a Sociology of Human Rights’ (2014) 3 *Culture & History Digital Journal (CSIC-CCHS)* 1, 3.

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Amy Sodaro, *Exhibiting Atrocity: Memorial Museums and the Politics of Past Violence* (Rutgers UP 2018)

<sup>85</sup> George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (University of Minnesota Press 2001) 213.

a closer look at which would provide a lens through other perspectives on the history. It aims to point to the ‘selectivity and the partiality of the dominant knowledge’<sup>86</sup> which is produced and put into circulation by the hegemony for the public eye. Counter memory might be the key to decipher the codes of the power, and it would help us ‘to understand and change the present by placing it in a new relation to the past’<sup>87</sup> as Henry Giroux argues.

<sup>86</sup> Yifat Gutman, ‘Looking Backward to the Future: Counter-Memory as Oppositional Knowledge-Production in the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict’ (2017) 65 *Current Sociology* 54, 56.

<sup>87</sup> Henry Giroux, *Pedagogy and the Politics of Hope: Theory, Culture and Schooling* (Westview Press 1997) 153.

## 4.

## JUSTICE AND MEMORY

## 4.1 MORALITY AND ETHICS OF REMEMBRANCE

J. Curkovic Nimac states that ‘memory from a moral standpoint is not unambiguously good but dangerously ambiguous’.<sup>88</sup> This evaluation points to the fact that there is nothing intrinsically good or bad in the act of remembering but it is the mediation of memory for different purposes which makes it good or bad. Yet, this does not mean that remembering cannot be justified on moral grounds, independently from whether it brings good or nothing at all.

Jeffrey Blustein asserts that there are two aspects of ethics of memory. According to the consequentialist<sup>89</sup> standpoint, which is where human rights and memory meet, remembering is essential because only then individual or collective responsibility can be taken for the past actions. Memory at this point can be instrumental and constitutive of the taking responsibility of the past actions which, in the case of the negative ones, can bring the possibility to make amends for it. Acknowledging the past actions is not only the first requirement for a compensation but it is also necessary to prevent the repetition of it. And more importantly memory, in this context, would promote individual and social healing.<sup>90</sup>

However, Blustein thinks that it is still possible to justify the significance of remembering even if the act of remembering does not bring any healing or social reconciliation. Attributing only practical

<sup>88</sup> Jasna Čurković Nimac, ‘Toward an Ethics of Memory. Is Memory the Root Cause of Violence or a Path to Violence Avoidance?’ (The Ethics of War and Peace 51st Annual Conference of the Societas Ethica, Slovenia, August 2014) 29.

<sup>89</sup> Jeffrey Blustein, *The Moral Demands of Memory* (Cambridge UP 2008) 337.

<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*

ends to memory is not enough to apprehend the act of remembering and the sentiments which are attached to it fully. Remembering can be an expression of love, honour and admiration and according to the expressivist<sup>91</sup> standpoint, there is something intrinsically valuable in it which the consequentialist approach would not be enough to explain.

It is clear that Blustein's formulation on memory depends basically on the distinction of past wrongdoings and remembrance of the beloved ones: the consequentialist approach referring to the former while the expressivist one pointing to the latter. What is common in this formulation is the claim that we should remember, which he calls 'imperative to remember', no matter what the outcome is. In the human rights context, it is obvious that memory is mostly approached from the consequentialist standpoint as the field of human rights itself is mostly about the violations, most of which cannot be addressed in time and thus become a subject of history and memory.

At this very point, locating memory within the context of human rights widens the scope of the ethics of memory as it adds more to be concerned in terms of the use and abuse of memory. As discussed above, memory's power as an 'effective tool to manage the past'<sup>92</sup> stands in a direct opposition with its vulnerability to fading and manipulation. That is to say, all memories which are revived by the act of remembrance intrinsically come with a claim of truth in them from which they derive their power. However, it is a fact that all memory narratives inevitably become 'imagined constructions'<sup>93</sup> when reconstructed more or less in the present. The tension between memory and truth is there, challenging the validity and authority of the narrative. Still, this does not change the moral obligation to remember truthfully which Paul Ricoeur calls 'doing justice to the past'.<sup>94</sup> From a moral point, when distorted, memory cannot be a legitimate source of any human rights violation claim, it would rather be a tool for any ideological motive which in that case would undermine its function. Memory in human rights context is loaded with a mission to construct a future by repairing the present and as Ricoeur puts it: 'it is justice (...) which turns memory into a project and it is this project of

<sup>91</sup> Blustein (n 89) 36.

<sup>92</sup> Jasna Čurković Nimac, 'An Ethical Outlook on The Influence of Memory on Violence' (2015) 2 *De Ethica: A Journal of Philosophical, Theological and Applied Ethics* 35.

<sup>93</sup> *ibid* 44.

<sup>94</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *The Reality of the Historical Past* (Marquette UP 1984) 26

justice that gives the form of future and of imperativeness to the duty of memory'.<sup>95</sup> That is to say, 'the duty of memory is the duty of justice'.<sup>96</sup>

Instrumentalisation of memory in the context of justice is advocated with optimistic presumptions that confrontation with the past brings healing and a social reconciliation automatically. However, remembering might pose a danger of turning what it meant to serve the other way around. Although it might sound convincing that remembering – when based on our sufferings and wounds – pushes us more to take a political action,<sup>97</sup> which makes it practically good, it also has the potential to turn the victims into the perpetrators<sup>98</sup> depending on the intensity of the pains of their memories. That is to say, although memory is intended to be used as a medium to prevent the violence, it can induce violence itself with the abuses it is susceptible to. It not only gives the justification necessary to commit violence to those who were exposed to it once, but it also empowers them with a feeling of revenge. Avishai Margalit thinks that the legacy of the painful memories might feed our motivation for political actions but this without doubt might be in divergent ways: either in the form of moral obligation to repair or to take revenge. Because as he puts it: 'memory breathes revenge as often as it breathes reconciliation'.<sup>99</sup> This is what Nimac means when he points to the moral ambiguity of memory from the very beginning. The ethics of remembrance is what matters in that case as the line between the violence and reconciliation is very contested within this context. So, promotion of a memory culture with moral obligation to confront only for reconciliation is of utmost importance which should be the imperative of the human rights regime.

Remembering of past wrongdoings can be defended from other non-consequentialist points of view as well. Even if no good comes out of confronting the legacy of past violations, and the means of reparation are of no use, remembering can be an act of resistance to the violence itself which undermines the morality. It can be used as a 'response to violence'<sup>100</sup> by those who are advocating the progress and democracy in society. Having a moral standpoint regardless of the outcomes is

<sup>95</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (The University of Chicago Press 2006) 88.

<sup>96</sup> *ibid* 89.

<sup>97</sup> Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (Harvard UP 2004) 111.

<sup>98</sup> Ćurković Nimac (n 92) 27.

<sup>99</sup> Margalit (n 97) 5.

<sup>100</sup> Amy Sodaro, *Exhibiting Atrocity: Memorial Museums and the Politics of Past Violence* (Rutgers UP 2018) 4

still morally necessary for the sake of morality itself. This message to the violence and the perpetrators, in turn, might have transformative effects in keeping the power relationships in balance, standing there as a mitigating factor of any misuse of power. So, in the final analysis, remembering for the sake of morality has consequentialist aspects anyway bringing if not immediate, but long term outcomes such as setting standards for what is intolerable and what is not, establishing moral principles which regulate social and political structures and so on.

#### 4.2 MEMORY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

It can be claimed that it is the memory of the Holocaust which marks the beginning of the interaction of memory and human rights, which was crystallised with the declaration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>101</sup> and UN's Genocide Convention in 1948<sup>102</sup>. From then on, memory has become the basis on which rights claims are made with an increasing emphasis on both in the national and international scale: making the path for a constant interaction between them. Today, the terms 'memory regime' and 'human rights regime' are in constant circulation in academic and legal discussions pointing out to the fact that we are going through an era which is featured by both.

Although they are separate and distinct discourses, memory and human rights are complimentary and they support each other as the oft-referred expression suggests: there can be no justice without memory. Huyssen states that although memory and human rights feed on the same moral and emotional claims, 'memory is fragile and difficult to verify, let alone legislate'<sup>103</sup> and human rights, in return, do not provide a powerful ground for memory to flourish as they are already 'contested, fragile and ineffectual'.<sup>104</sup> This points to the fact the terrain on which

<sup>101</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights ( adopted 10 December 1948 UNGA Res 217 A(III) (UDHR) <<https://un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>> accessed 18 March 2020.

<sup>102</sup> Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide 1948 (adopted December 9 1948 UNGA Res 260 A(III) entered into force 12 January 1951) <<https://ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crimeofgenocide.aspx>> accessed 18 March 2020 .

<sup>103</sup> Andreas Huyssen, 'International Human Rights and the Politics of Memory: Limits and Challenges' (2012) 53 *Criticism*, 607, 612.

<sup>104</sup> *ibid* 611.



human rights and memory interact is a slippery one from the very beginning.

Despite the tension, the human rights movement, for Huyssen, owes a lot to memory as it would not be where it is now without the memory of the atrocities of the 20th century. History has shown that after long periods of oppressive regimes and dictatorships, memory has been the only legitimate ground to pursue justice as were the cases with Chile and Argentina.<sup>105</sup> After long spiral of silences, it is the memory which can provide the framework for justice or at least confrontation with the wrongdoings of the past. So, in the final analysis, the function of memory in the human rights regime might be claimed to push the limits of the legal possibilities as far as they can go and advocate the prevention of repetition of the atrocities and violations for a better future, as human rights is a future-oriented movement promising a better world. Moreover, another important contribution of memory discourse, according to Huyssen, would be its power to provide the international human rights regime with a concrete ground by which it hinders it from falling into 'ahistorical abstraction'.<sup>106</sup>

#### *4.2.1 Transitional justice and memory*

The intersection of memory and human rights lies at the very heart of transitional justice as any discussion of memory within the rights context would be incomplete without mentioning this phenomenon. A subfield of human rights, transitional justice is inherently memory-based as it is primarily about dealing with the legacy of past and confronting the past while constructing the future. It is as much about the past as it is about the present and future.

In the broadest sense, transitional justice is about the ways and strategies applied to deal with the legacy of massive, systematic and gross human rights violations taking place during repressive regimes or conflicts in a specific area. Revealing the truth of the past and making a record of it, acknowledgement of the wrongdoings, criminal prosecutions, recognition of the victims and their dignity, enabling a reconciliation for a better future, material and symbolic reparations of

<sup>105</sup> Huyssen (n 103) 612.

<sup>106</sup> *ibid* 617.

the harms, memorialisation, fight against impunity, establishing the rule of law and deterrence of the recurrence are what transitional justice applies in countries undergoing democratisation.

Truth is key to transitional justice discussions as it is what is aimed to be ‘confronted’ for an individual or societal healing and reconciliation, which are the ultimate aims of the phenomenon. Truth is aimed to be reached with mediation of memory at both the individual and collective level, not just for delivery of justice via criminal prosecutions but also for making a record of the history. The right to truth has become incorporated into the international law<sup>107</sup> and similarly truth seeking has become an obligation of the state when a reconciliation is promised. Transitional justice takes the memories of the victims to its focus as the mediator to reach the truth it aims to establish, and thus the memory in transitional justice is ‘moral in character chief carriers of which is the victims themselves’.<sup>108</sup> It is their ‘(hi)story of suffering’<sup>109</sup> on the ground of which ‘a shared – moral – memory’<sup>110</sup> is built with the aim to ensure a better future as Chrisje Brants and Katrien Klep put it and this, at the same time, would mean ‘doing justice to the victims themselves’.<sup>111</sup>

#### 4.2.2 *Memorialisation as a form of reparation*

There has been an increase in the demand and motivation for memorialisation worldwide by the states of post-conflict societies, grassroots activist groups and victims of gross human rights violations in countries going through a transition from violence. Brandon Hamber, Liz Sevckenko and Ereshnee Naidu remind us of a few demands from various contexts including Rwandans who have refused to bury their dead until they get an official recognition, Argentinians who ran a 30-year campaign for justice for the memory of the disappeared and Liberians who asked for memory sites for the victims of the conflict,

<sup>107</sup> UNHRC, ‘Right to Truth’ Res 9/11 (18 July 2008) 9<sup>th</sup> Session A/HRC/RES/ 9/11 <[https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/E/HRC/resolutions/A\\_HRC\\_RES\\_9\\_11.pdf](https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/E/HRC/resolutions/A_HRC_RES_9_11.pdf)> accessed 17 November 2019.

<sup>108</sup> Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (Yale University 2006) 30.

<sup>109</sup> Chrisje Brants and Katrien Klep, ‘Transitional Justice: History-Telling, Collective Memory, and the Victim-Witness’ (2013) 7 *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 1, 12.

<sup>110</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> *ibid.*

which, as a result, came as the first recommendation of the country's Truth and Reconciliation Committee report.<sup>112</sup>

Memorialisation is a symbolic reparation which can take many forms such as apologies, commemorations, monuments, museums, plaques, exhumation, renaming of streets and public spheres. They might come along with the rulings of regional human rights courts; truth commissions' mandate and/or recommendations or they can be initiated by different stakeholders in different contexts.

The intended aim behind reparations is reconciliation and healing both on individual and national level. In the face of deep massive traumas and violations which are not feasible to be repaired legally or financially, there are many things which symbolic reparations can fulfil from the victims' side. On the individual level, it is believed that collective symbolic reparations aim at 'restoring the human dignity'.<sup>113</sup> In other words, it means to 're-humanize'<sup>114</sup> the victims, which money cannot achieve on its own. On the social level, addressing the memories of the victims and the survivors with symbolic actions brings a public recognition and acknowledgement. This, Lisa Margarrell argues, is crucially important as it would not only mean an official recognition by the state authorities, but it also facilitates a broader acknowledgment by society on what happened and who has been victimised.<sup>115</sup> Locating the individual sufferings of the victims in the public framework and official historical narrative has psychological benefits as well. Hamber and Richard Wilson argue that it would help in crystallising the traumatic event thanks to which responsibility and accountability can be re-attributed, which has a soothing effect on its own from the survivors' side: by 'labelling responsibility' and addressing the perpetrators, the ambiguous feelings and the guilt the survivors feel can be relieved.<sup>116</sup> However, it is not only the perpetrators who are labelled but the victim

<sup>112</sup> Brandon Hamber, L Sevchenko and E Naidu, 'Utopian Dreams or Practical Possibilities? The Challenges of Evaluating the Impact of Memorialization in Societies in Transition' (2010) 4 *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 397, 397-398.

<sup>113</sup> UNCHR, Forty-ninth Session 'Question of the Impunity of Perpetrators of Human Rights Violations (Civil and Political)' (2 October 1997), UN Doc E/CN.4/S-2/1997/20.

<sup>114</sup> Alice Reiner, 'Reparations and the Issue of Culture, Gender, Indigenous Populations and Freedom of Expression: "Children & Reparations"' (2007) 56 *American University Law Review* 1375, 1442.

<sup>115</sup> Lisa Margarrell, 'Reparations in Theory and Practice' (2007) 5 <<http://ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-Global-Reparations-Practice-2007-English.pdf>> accessed 17 March 2020.

<sup>116</sup> Brandon Hamber and Richard A Wilson, 'Symbolic Closure through Memory, Reparation and Revenge in Post-Conflict Societies' (2002) 1 *Journal of Human Rights* 35, 38.

status of those whose rights are violated which is acknowledged, which provides them with conditions for externalising their personal griefs that would ease overcoming them.<sup>117</sup> And last but not least, symbolic addressing of past violations is thought to be preventive in nature. ‘Never again!’ is the message which is intrinsic to all the symbolic reparation initiatives and it is an investment to the future where the reoccurrence of the violations is aimed to be prevented.

Memorial places have many functions. According to Louis Bickford, all memorials have both a private and public side. At the private level, they provide a space for honouring the memory and dignity of the victims; for mourning for their sufferings; for healing, solemnity and personal reflection. In the public side of the memorials, it is believed that it brings a public recognition and acknowledgement of private suffering which is at the heart of the reparative side of the memorials, bringing consolation and healing.<sup>118</sup> On the other hand, memorial places invite visitors to self-reflection and contemplation, making them think critically on the atrocities and the reasons lying behind their occurrence<sup>119</sup> and develop empathy and tolerance towards different groups within the society. Depending on their design, they might also function as forums of discussions and dialogue among different segments of the society as a whole to come to terms with the past.<sup>120</sup> Moreover, when created on the actual sites of atrocities, memorial places provide a platform to experience feelings, to talk about what happened to whom and to educate visitors by transmitting the memory to the future generations. This can be preventive on its own.

However, memorialisation is a delicate issue which might serve just the opposite purposes if not planned and implemented carefully. Memory of a negative past has the potential of inciting hatred, deepening the divisions in a fragmented society and feeding the feelings of vengeance among polarised groups. Any memory initiative in such a context would not be immune from the power struggles over the past as it is not only a matter of symbolic value, but rather a gateway from the legal responsibilities and impunity for those who are responsible for the violations.

<sup>117</sup> Hamber and Wilson (n 116) 38.

<sup>118</sup> Sebastian Brett, L Bickford, L Sev enko and M Rios, ‘Memorialization and Democracy: State Policy and Civic Action’ (2007) 6.

<sup>119</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> *ibid.*

According to Luke Moffett, the political nature of reparations, in process of transitions, can dilute the elements of acknowledgement, remedy and responsibility in reparation initiatives.<sup>121</sup> By formulating the past traumas within the official narrative, acknowledgment and responsibility components might be weakened by the discourses the state adopts. The state can either whitewash itself by overshadowing the violence it used towards the victims or justify it by creating a stigma discourse for the victims such as terrorism. And in terms of remedy, it can be said that mere symbolic actions without addressing the responsibility and accountability for the sake of a forced reconciliation as a political project might be far from being a remedy for the victims but rather an empty and insincere gesture having a risk of backlash.

By instrumentalisation of memory as a political tool, around which an official narrative is created, an attempt is made to re-write the past in a selective way with some parts being distorted, to serve to the purposes of present political concerns. This might result in further marginalisation of already vulnerable groups and their re-victimisation. For example, highlighting famous or well-known popular public figures and excluding ordinary individual stories of victims cannot bring any recognition of personal sufferings from the victims' side. They cannot relate themselves to the legacy of the past with the way it is represented. Naidu gives the example of South African case to illustrate what she calls the 'inherent lack of representation of the ordinary persons and individual narratives'<sup>122</sup> in memorialisation initiatives. According to her findings, by highlighting the prominent individuals and events, the South African state overlooked the regular activists and the South African people that have been victims of human rights violations and violence.<sup>123</sup>

Another thorny terrain of memorialisation might be the danger of memory becoming a subject of identity politics with which groups might come up for illegitimate right claims or pursuit for revenge. As previously discussed, memory is central to identity and in many

<sup>121</sup> Luke Moffett, 'Transitional Justice and Reparations: Remediating the Past?' in Cheryl Lawther, Luke Moffett and Dov Jacobs (eds), *Research Handbook on Transitional Justice* (Edward Elgar Publishing 2017) 382.

<sup>122</sup> Ereshnee Naidu, 'Symbolic Reparations: A Fractured Opportunity' (Center for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation 2004) 9-10 <[www.csvr.org.za/docs/livingmemory/symbolicreparations.pdf](http://www.csvr.org.za/docs/livingmemory/symbolicreparations.pdf)> accessed 13 November 2019.

<sup>123</sup> *ibid.*

countries which are plagued with conflicts, the fragmentation takes places on the basis of ethnicity, religion, sexual or political orientation which are all significant components of identity. In transition periods of such contexts, memory, if not democratised, might be a battle ground for those diverse groups, leading to further polarisation. Naidu argues that only if multiple narratives of victims and survivors are represented democratically, can memorialisation promise a reconciliation.<sup>124</sup> Because multiple narratives might encourage hidden stories to come out therefore they contribute to the development of an alternative history, which is inherently constructive.<sup>125</sup> For this very reason, it can be argued that following multiple narratives as a principle in all memorialisation initiatives both democratises the memory and encourages alternative narratives.

<sup>124</sup> Naidu (n 122) 5.

<sup>125</sup> Impunity Watch, 'Policy Brief: Guiding Principles of Memorialisation' (2013) Perspectives Series 11 <[https://impunitywatch.nl/docs/PolicyBrief\\_Guiding\\_Principles\\_of\\_Memorialisation\\_2013\\_eng.pdf](https://impunitywatch.nl/docs/PolicyBrief_Guiding_Principles_of_Memorialisation_2013_eng.pdf)> accessed 2 November 2019.

## 5.

TURKEY AND CONFRONTATION WITH THE LEGACY OF  
THE PAST

## 5.1 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*5.1.1 A democracy interrupted with coup d'états*

In 96 years of its life span, Turkey has had a long yet interrupted set of experiences with democracy, which still is quite fragile. The military, which played an important role in the establishment of the Turkish Republic and thus is highly credited, regarded itself as the guardian of the Kemalist principles –especially secularism and nationalism<sup>126</sup> – and as the protector of the national interests, on the ground of which it intervened democratically when it considered necessary.

Starting from the 1950s, when single-party rule ended and Turkey started to experience multi-party democracy, military has been the watchdog of politics with direct or indirect interventions establishing a solid and long-lasting tutelage within civilian democracy. The military tutelage was incorporated into the democracy at the institutional level (National Security Council) via which the army communicated its demands to the civilian government to maintain its power.<sup>127</sup>

The right versus left clashes, the Kurdish question and armed conflict, political instability, economic crises, street violence and threat to secularism which plagued the Turkish political history have given the military the grounds on which it justified the interventions it undertook

<sup>126</sup> William Hale, 'The Turkish Republic and Its Army, 1923-1960' (2011) 12 *Turkish Studies* 191, 195.

<sup>127</sup> George S Harris, 'Military Coups and Turkish Democracy, 1960-1980' (2011) 12(2) *Turkish Studies* 203, 204.

so far, as Turkish people tend to see the army as the saviour during these times<sup>128</sup> to such an extent that it has been crystallised by catchphrase ‘Army! Do your duty!’, which is a call for military takeover, in the times of unrest or discontent with the government, which appear either on newspaper headlines or on banners in massive protests, etc.

There have been two direct military interventions, three memorandums and five coup attempts so far. After direct interventions of 1960 and the 1980s, the parliamentary rule was suspended for a short period of time; however, with memorandums the governments were made either step down or take measures the military dictated to them. Zeki Sarigil names the period between 1960-2001 as a ‘militocracy’<sup>129</sup> in which the army was the watchdog of the political system and shaped it. The 2000s, however, is the decade which marked the end of the ‘militocracy’ and the beginning of a new era which he names as ‘civilocracy’:<sup>130</sup> with a desire to become an EU member, a set of reforms and changes were made to restrict military’s political powers and to end the tutelage, as a result of which the military was left out of the game. However, there is a very interesting point in Sarigil’s claim which contends that the civil-military relations in Turkey have proved to follow a cyclical pattern so far. According to this pattern, every civilian supremacy period has been followed by a military one in history. So, he raises the question whether this cycle is broken with the civilocracy period or not.<sup>131</sup> Unfortunately, the time proved him right and another military coup attempt took place on 15 July 2016, being the most destructive and violent of its kind. A state of emergency was declared and democracy was suspended for two years. The fact that the cycle is not broken remains salient.

In the light of what has been so far, it can be said that Turkey’s political history is the history of direct and indirect military interventions. The democracy has been weakened with continuous interruptions almost every ten years and suspended for various periods during which gross human rights violations took place. A circle of fear and silence was created with torture, imprisonment and execution of the dissidents. Impunity has been assured with a legal shield created by the military tutelage which made it impossible to prosecute those who were involved in the

<sup>128</sup> Zeki Sarigil, ‘The Turkish Military: Principal or Agent?’ (2014) 40 *Armed Forces and Society* 1, 16.

<sup>129</sup> *ibid* 8.

<sup>130</sup> *ibid* 9.

<sup>131</sup> *ibid*.



interventions until the 12 September 2010 constitutional referendum, with which certain amendments have been made to deal with the past.

### 5.1.2 1990s: a decade plagued with conflicts and state violence

It is obvious that with the continuous military interventions, violence has become part of the political history and a constitutive element of state practice to oppress the citizens. The 12 September 1980 intervention has been the most destructive of all with a legacy of systematic human rights violations, a spiral of silence and fear, a deepened Kurdish question and many other problems which continued to affect the following decade in an intensive way.

One of the groups the 1980 military regime had cracked down on was Kurdish people. The Kurdish question, which had already started before the coup, was dealt with by excessive violence during the military regime. Those who were politicised with separatist demands were punished severely. What marked the violent environment of the 1990s was the way the state responded to the Kurdish question in post-coup Turkey. Instead of considering it as an age-old issue and dealing with the root causes of the problem, the state regarded the Kurdish issue as a matter of security. Accordingly, the state dealt with the Kurdish question by adopting warfare and in order to wage a war against Kurds, it followed two methods: a declaration of a state of emergency and transformations in military, political and administrative levels.<sup>132</sup>

With the state of emergency – which covered the cities populated by the Kurdish people and lasted for 23 years – a shield of impunity was provided to protect the local administrative figures and counter-guerrilla organisations which were created to wage a dirty war.<sup>133</sup> Turkish military forces adopted a ‘irregular warfare’<sup>134</sup> strategy which went beyond conventional warfare methods, targeting not only armed groups but civilians as well. As a result of this strategy, many villages were evacuated by force and the number of forced disappearances in the form of unidentified murders and civilian executions increased.<sup>135</sup>

One of the prominent components of the state-led violence has been

<sup>132</sup> Özgür Sevgi Göral, Ayhan Işık and Özlem Kaya, *The Unspoken Truth: Enforced Disappearances* (Truth, Justice and Memory Center 2013) 16-19.

<sup>133</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> *ibid.* 31.

the forced disappearances which started just before the 12 September coup and continued to increase until the end of the 1990s. Leftist people and specifically Kurdish people were targeted. Based on the data collected by the field work by many organisations, Truth Justice and Memory Centre gives the number of disappeared people as 1953 (between 1980-2004). 500 persons were verified so far, 28 of whom are under the age of 18. The bodies of 282 people are still to be found.<sup>136</sup>

The 1990s were characterised by the conflict between the Turkish army and PKK (the Kurdistan Workers' Party) which resulted in torture, forced disappearances, forced displacement, arbitrary and summary executions and gross human rights violations which according to many are crimes against humanity. Impunity has been the state policy since then and those who were held responsible for many civilian deaths and forced disappearances were not only cleared from what they did but also promoted.<sup>137</sup>

## 5.2 ATTEMPTS TO COME TO TERMS WITH THE PAST IN TURKEY

### 5.2.1 *Grassroots activism for confrontation*

The culture of violence and impunity, which marked the post-1980 coup era, gave birth to a growing public investigation into the widespread and systematic human rights violations which were covered up by the state. In order to shed light on the covered-up atrocities, victim families and people from different professions came together and started grassroots activism in Turkey. The post-coup era is the period when human rights activism became institutionalised.<sup>138</sup>

Prominent human rights organisations (HROs) such as İnsan Hakları Derneği (Human rights association), Türkiye İnsan Hakları Vakfı

<sup>136</sup> Hafıza Merkezi, 'Saturday Mother's Vigil Banned by Security Forces | Hafıza Merkezi' (2 October 2018) <<https://hakikatadalethafiza.org/en/saturday-mothers-vigil-is-banned-by-security-forces/>> accessed 10 June 2019.

<sup>137</sup> Hafıza Merkezi, 'New State Policy Aims to Cover up Atrocities in 1990s! | Hafıza Merkezi' (4 September 2015) <<https://hakikatadalethafiza.org/en/new-state-policy-aims-to-cover-up-atrocities-in-1990s/>> accessed 10 June 2019.

<sup>138</sup> Şebnem Korur Fincancı, 'Human Rights Activism' in Esra Özyürek, Gaye Özpınar and Emrah Altındış (eds), *Authoritarianism and Resistance in Turkey: Conversations on Democratic and Social Changes* (Springer 2019) 203.

(Turkish human rights association) and Mazlumder (The Associations of Human Rights and Solidarity for the Oppressed) were established by intellectuals, professionals and victim relatives. They reported and publicised the violations not only at the national level but also at the international level, being in contact and collaboration with other HROs.

Besides the institutionalised struggles against rights violations, victim relatives were engaged in other forms of activism in their search for truth and redress for their losses. Inspired by the Plaza de Mayo, Saturday Mothers started a civil-disobedient movement in 1995 by sitting silently in Galatasaray Square holding the pictures of their relatives who either had disappeared by force or were killed by unsolved political murders. The silent sit-in protest have continued since then and as of 11 June 2019, they have had their 741st gathering.

This is one of the most prominent forms of grassroots activism in Turkey for many reasons. Their demand for the truth of the whereabouts of their family members made the issue of forced disappearances visible in the public eye which according to Fincancı is important for families' sense of justice.<sup>139</sup> It is thanks to their peaceful protest that we know about those who were 'burnt in acid wells, shot with a single bullet in the neck and left to rot at the edge of a wall under three stones'.<sup>140</sup> Besides, it is thanks to their insistent struggle that the mass graves in eastern Turkey were revealed and came to be investigated legally and scientifically.

Marlies Casier quotes from Başak Çalı in saying that the emerging HROs in post-1980 coup filled an important gap in Turkey where there was no trade unions or parties to challenge the state violence. Thus HROs inhabited an anti-authoritarian space providing a platform where state policies and ideologies could be criticised by people.<sup>141</sup> Besides, institutionalisation of human rights has been important in that by monitoring, recording and reporting the systematic abuses they not only pushed the government for redress but also increased the visibility of the violations. In the final analysis, activism by both the relatives of the victims and the HROs contributed to the creation and establishment of a human rights discourse in Turkey.

<sup>139</sup> Fincancı (n 138) 209.

<sup>140</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> Marlies Casier, 'Contesting the "Truth" of Turkey's Human Rights Situation: State-Association Interactions in and Outside the Southeast' (2009) 10 *European Journal of Turkish Studies* 1, 4.

### 5.2.2 Official attempts for confrontation

As a brand-new party born into the chaotic political atmosphere of the 2000s, AKP needed legitimacy and consolidation of its power. So, from the earliest day of its foundation, AKP adopted a set of reforms and democratic regulations in attempt to get full membership of the EU. AKP reinforced its pro-EU image by adopting progressive discourses such as addressing human rights, democratic values and economic development; showing a willingness for resolving the age-old Kurdish issue; tackling the military tutelage and bringing the country the political and economic stability that it lacked for a long time.

Regarding the Kurdish issue, prominent steps were taken such as lifting the state of emergency after 23 years, enacting laws to provide compensation to those who had 'pecuniary losses stemming from terrorist activities or fight against terrorism'<sup>142</sup> and carrying out diggings to reveal summary executions of Kurdish civilians by the counter-guerrilla organisation Jandarma İstihbarat ve Terörle Mücadele (JITEM).

According to İlhan Uzgel, in order to end the military tutelage, the constitution of 1980 – a product of the 1980 junta – was targeted by AKP with the discourse it created in which the military stands in a stark antagonism with democratisation and democratisation is possible only if the state is totally demilitarised, a goal which AKP presented itself as the only vehicle to achieve this.<sup>143</sup> With the discourse created, AKP promised confrontation, reforms and individual rights and liberties by bringing a constitutional amendment on the agenda, which created excitement and got support from all segments of the society. However, the drafted changes were concerned mainly with shifting the balance of power in favour of AKP rather than expanding civil rights and liberties.<sup>144</sup> The referendum was held on 12 September 2010, on the 30th anniversary of the coup – not a coincidence at all – with the result 58% in favour, 42% against.

<sup>142</sup> TBMM, Teror ve Terörle Mücadeleden Doğan Zararların Karşılanması Hakkında Kanun Turkish Grand National Assembly Act (2004) [5233] <<https://tbmm.gov.tr/kanunlar/k5233.html>> accessed 11 June 2019.

<sup>143</sup> Sarp Balcı, 'Darbe Komisyonuna Yedi Ay Değil Yedi Yıl Verilseyd Dahi Sonuç Değişmezdi! İlhan Uzgel İle Söyleşi' (2012) 36 Mülkiye Dergisi 219, 220.

<sup>144</sup> Berna Turam, 'Turkey Under the AKP: Are Rights and Liberties Safe?' (2012) 23 Journal of Democracy 109, 110.

Following the referendum, as part of the AKP's confrontation claims, with civil society and international actors seeking change from the bottom up, a Parliamentary Coup and Memorandum Investigation Commission was established in 2012. The voluminous report it released received many criticisms: Uzgel points out the fact that the commission is a product of AKP's political agenda shaped by pursuit of legitimacy and consolidation of power on the path of changing the regime from parliamentary democracy to the presidential system.<sup>145</sup> So, the report, he argues, is highly biased, avoiding touching the real point rather than giving a thorough insight on the factors leading to the military interventions. It is far from being functional for confronting the legacy of the past, or for any kind of progress to democratisation.

In the immediate aftermath of the referendum, on 13 September 2010, petitions for the prosecution of the coup leaders poured into the courts in many cities, accompanied with huge protests.<sup>146</sup> Demands for the prosecution were put on the public agenda by scholars, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), HROs, victims, relatives of victims and media. As a result, the military leaders Kenan Evren and Tahsin Şahinkaya were prosecuted and sentenced to life imprisonment and their military ranks were deemed invalid. However, as Gülten Gürsoy Ataman claims, it was two of the generals who were put on trial rather than the coup itself<sup>147</sup> and it was rather a symbolic sub-trial<sup>148</sup> with almost no contribution to revealing the truth regarding the systematic human rights violations which occurred before, during and after the coup. Taking into account the fact that the generals were not accused of torture but of committing crimes against the constitutional order, yet the atrocities committed during the coup, which increase in seriousness up to crimes against humanity and have been on trial in local courts, in 57 different cities with little progress or public attention, show that although retributive justice was adopted, the trials have proved to be of little satisfaction.<sup>149</sup>

<sup>145</sup> Balcı (n 141) 221.

<sup>146</sup> Zeynep Kuray, "Evet'ten Hemen Sonra Darbecilere Suç Duyurusu" *Birgün* (2010) <<https://birgun.net/haber-detay/evetten-hemen-sonra-darbecilere-suc-duyurusu-55076.html>> accessed 13 June 2019.

<sup>147</sup> Gülten Gürsoy Ataman, 'Coming to Terms with the 12 September Coup D'état: The South African Experience Reconsidered' (2014) 6 *Alternatif Politika* 421, 434.

<sup>148</sup> '12 Eylül Davası | FAILI BELLİ' <<https://failibelli.org/dava/12-eylul-davasi/>> accessed 13 June 2019.

<sup>149</sup> Ataman (n 147).

The reforms and liberties adopted one after another in an unprecedented scale during AKP's earlier terms, together with the legal attempts to tackle the legacy of the past, created a hope for strengthening the democracy, protection of human rights and progress in many fields. The official discourse created by the brand-new party, which constantly addressed the past, created a momentum from the HROs and NGOs, and enabled them to raise their voices more for confrontation and redress by running campaigns, raising awareness, providing the state with the data needed for prosecutions and empowering the victim families. Paul Kubicek agrees, stating that the rise of the pro-EU AKP has created a 'domestic constellation of forces' which were in support of a reform, thus accelerating it to a great extent. However, he underlines the fact that despite all the achievements of the civil society, it is hard to talk about grassroots revolution in Turkey's context as the EU was central in the reform process. Both the timing and the content of the reforms, such as abolishment of the death penalty, show the role of the EU as the main trigger of the reforms.<sup>150</sup>

### 5.3 CONFRONTATION: AN EMPTY GESTURE

As discussed above, Turkey went through a transition period in the 2000s with promises for strengthening the democracy, claims of confrontation and high hopes for social reconciliation. The reforms and regulations accomplished by the government were presented as the product of the human rights discourse AKP adopted in its policies. This innovative and brave approach was welcomed by many people from all segments of the society and it created a ground on which age-old unspoken issues came to be discussed and demands for confrontation were expressed louder by civil society. The decade has been marked with an atmosphere of liberty; optimism for change and progress; polyphony created by numerous platforms with increasing civil engagement and participation; and pushing for reform from the bottom up for further steps for human rights.

<sup>150</sup> Paul Kubicek, 'The European Union and Grassroots Democratization in Turkey' (2005) 6 *Turkish Studies* 361, 373.

However, the real motivations behind this heyday have been revealed in the course of time and Turkey has since fallen into the cycle of oppression, authoritarianism and state violence more than ever with the weakened judiciary and legislative institutions that have come to serve the interests of not the military but those who are in power. Taking a retrospective look at the measures and mechanisms adopted for so-called confrontation, the process speaks for itself on the depth and genuineness of the steps taken towards coming to terms with the past.

Regarding the Kurdish question, the embracing, solution-oriented Kurdish discourse came to an end, turning all the initial efforts upside down and deepening the division between Kurdish citizens and the state more than ever. The approach to the Kurdish issue has been shaped with the political interests and agenda of AKP from the beginning to the end with constant changes in the discourse, from citizens to terrorists.

Moreover, the confrontation discourse with which the campaign for the 2010 referendum was run, with the promise of coming to terms with the legacy of the military junta, proved empty. The Parliamentary Commission to investigate the coups was an extension of this attempt which turned out to be completely dysfunctional in bringing any concrete solution for the ongoing problems. Yet, it was highly influential in creating an illusion of confrontation and creating a consensus on the necessity of eliminating the military surveillance over the civilian democracy. Once the threat of the military was weakened by putting the army under the civilian authority with the help of the EU-led reforms<sup>151</sup> and the referendum resulted in triumph, Erdoğan consolidated his power and pushed further for a presidential system. The EU talks stopped as he did not need them anymore in the face of any potential threats from the army<sup>152</sup> and the discourse of confrontation has accomplished its mission.

Considering the mechanisms utilised to come to terms with the legacy of the past such as the judicial compensation programmes, exhumations and prosecution of the perpetrators, trial of the coup leaders and establishment of parliamentary commission for the investigation of the coups, under the light of discussions above, the politics behind the confrontation discourse can be seen clearly. The official narrative

<sup>151</sup> Birol A Yeşilada, 'The Future of Erdoğan and the AKP' (2016) 17 Turkish Studies 19, 27.

<sup>152</sup> *ibid.*

created about the past, the claims and promises to confront it, addressing human rights and liberties, and progressive reforms and regulations have all proved to be accomplished with the pursuit of legitimacy and consolidation of power.

Although there have been important steps towards accountability, impunity and prosecution of the perpetrators during the transition period, looking back from 2019, it can be claimed that those proved to be far from contributing to a real redress and ending the vertical state-led culture of violence, widespread and systematic human rights violations, and most importantly the non-repetition of the military intervention. Therefore, it is not wrong to contend that what has been presented as confrontation has turned out to be an empty gesture as a whole.



## 6.

## CASE STUDY: ULUCANLAR PRISON MUSEUM

## 6.1 HISTORY OF PRISON

Located in Hamamönü neighbourhood, Ulucanlar Prison was first built as a military storage in the 1920s and then turned into a prison in 1925.<sup>153</sup> It was constructed by the Ministry of Interiors as a public prison upon an offer made by German architect Carl Christoph Lörcher.<sup>154</sup> As the first modern prison of the Turkish Republic, the prison served for 81 years – from 1925 until 2006 – under different names, Ulucanlar being the last one.<sup>155</sup> In its 81-year life, the prison witnessed 18 executions, torture, protests, atrocities, violence and jailbreaks. With the vivid history of the prison and the significant political figures it hosted, Ulucanlar has become the symbol of state violence and political transitions Turkey has experienced historically.



*Figure 1 Ulucanlar Prison Museum*

<sup>153</sup> Cetin Ünalın (ed), *Tarıkların Ulucanlar'ı: Sözlü Tarib* (TMMOB Mimarlar Odası Ankara Şubesi 2010).

<sup>154</sup> Ulucanlar Cezaevi Müzesi, 'Müzenin Tarihçesi' (2013) <<https://ulucanlarcezaevimuzesi.com/default.asp?page=icerik&id=27>> accessed 14 June 2019.

<sup>155</sup> *ibid.*

## 6.2 FROM PRISON TO MUSEUM: THE CONTESTED PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION

Ulucanlar is located in the neighbourhood of Altındağ, a poor shantytown district at the heart of Ankara. Consisting of traditional Ankara houses, the neighbourhood has undergone an urban transformation process by Altındağ Municipality recently. Hamamönü is now a popular tourist attraction in Ankara, expanding more with the new restored areas adding up. As part of this transformation, the initial plan was to build a shoe-makers market on the spot of the prison upon its evacuation in 2006. However, because of the historical and symbolic significance of Ulucanlar, the plan received strong objections from civil society. Upon this, Türk Mühendis ve Mimarlar Odası Birliği TMMOB (Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects) and the Ankara Bar Association – which are strongly oppositional professional organisations – came up with a campaign (PROJEFİKİR) with which they made a call for projects to turn the prison into a memory space. Tezcan Candan, the chairperson of TMMOB Ankara, states:

Actually, our initial plan was not to produce a project but seeing that the premises was going to be turned to a shoe-makers shop, we quickly made a call for project competition. And it was actually a call for a common sense through which we wanted to hear from different segments of the society on how to turn Ulucanlar into a memory space. However it has been a tough process.<sup>156</sup>

During the temporary exhibition held in the prison, where the winner projects were presented with the official permission taken from the Ministry of Justice, Ulucanlar was visited by 15,000 people in 15 days. The interest in the event was so big that there were long queues in front of the gate, where once relatives of the prisoners were waiting to visit them. Candan said, ‘We knew very well that people were coming for confrontation and the exhibition was just a means to it’,<sup>157</sup> adding that with the attention given to the event during the 15-day-period, the prison determined its own fate as it had already become a memory place in the public eye. It served as a venue for a set of other cultural organisations and events for a while during which TMMOB and the Ministry of Justice engaged in a constructive dialogue.

<sup>156</sup> Interview with Tezcan Candan, Chairwoman of TMMOB (Ankara, Turkey, May 2019).

<sup>157</sup> *ibid.*

In the aftermath of the temporary exhibition, the Ministry of Justice agreed to turn Ulucanlar into a memorial museum and an official protocol was signed between Ankara Bar Association, the Ministry of Justice, TMMOB and Altındağ Municipality, which included the process that would occur afterwards. Candan states that Altındağ Municipality created problems since the very first day of its involvement and once the project was ready, TMMOB was totally excluded from the transformation process although it was the organisation in charge. Even though the original project was stuck to, to a great extent, the municipality made many changes in Ulucanlar, demolishing and restoring parts as they wanted. To protest the changes made in the museum, a group of architects from TMMOB gathered in front of Ulucanlar and made a statement about how Altındağ Municipality took control of the process and destroyed the memory. They wanted to go inside but they were not let in.<sup>158</sup> Candan says that the police intervened and they were ‘swept by force out of the prison’.<sup>159</sup>

‘We see this as our achievement that the prison still stands there and yet it is the government’s shame that it has lost its soul’ says Candan and she adds, ‘Even so, we brought in a memorial museum of international standards’.<sup>160</sup> She claims that TMMOB contributed to creation of a spatial awareness in Turkey, which gained momentum with Ulucanlar and continued with other protests such as the Gezi Park protests, ‘because as architects, we have a historical responsibility for this’.<sup>161</sup> Therefore, the process of transformation initiated by TMMOB was marked with the principle of participation, by which the engagement of civil society was ensured. But more importantly, Candan claims that a real confrontation took place during the temporary exhibition, ‘There was a participant student in the project competition who during the exhibition learnt that her father stayed in Ulucanlar; and there were some parents who confessed to their kids during the museum tour that they had stayed there’.<sup>162</sup>

<sup>158</sup> Eray Görgülü, ‘Ankara Haberleri - Ulucanlar Kavgası’ *Hürriyet* (Ankara, 22 Ekim 2010) <[www.hurriyet.com.tr/ulucanlar-kavgasi-16102569](http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/ulucanlar-kavgasi-16102569)> accessed 15 June 2019.

<sup>159</sup> Candan (n 156).

<sup>160</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> *ibid.*

Another point highlighted by Candan is that Altındağ Municipality was involved in the process not only for the material benefits the musealisation would bring, but also for its symbolic significance. That being said, by having claim on the heritage of the past, the rising ‘majoritarian conservatism’ of AKP<sup>163</sup> tries to construct ideological ties with the past as well as present. And that explains why they take all the credit for the museum, not mentioning TMMOB in their publications nor on the website. Candan says that by ignoring and excluding TMMOB, even the memory of the transformation process has been erased.

### 6.3 THE POLITICS BEHIND THE MUSEUM

#### 6.3.1 *Reflections of the main historical events in the museum*

As the first modern prison built by the Turkish Republic, Ulucanlar has been the witness of its political history. The prominent political events resonated in the prison as it was one of the first detention centres for political prisoners. However, the reflection of the important historical events cannot be traced coherently within the museum.

The Ulucanlar massacre (1999) is the bloodiest intervention in the history of the prison. The prisoners had been complaining about the insufficient capacity of the wards for two years when they finally started a protest by not giving roll call to the guards.<sup>164</sup> The protests were suppressed by the intervention of the gendarmerie which resulted in the death of ten prisoners with gunfire and many others getting injured heavily and tortured.<sup>165</sup> Based on the testimonies of the survivors, the details of the attack have been revealed showing that it was organised by the state with participation of the soldiers and prison officers.

<sup>163</sup> Onur Bakiner, ‘Is Turkey Coming to Terms with Its Past? Politics of Memory and Majoritarian Conservatism’ (2013) 41 Nationalities Papers 1.

<sup>164</sup> Interview with Murat Özçelik, Ex-prisoner, (Ankara, Turkey, May 2019).

<sup>165</sup> TBMM İnsan Hakları İnceleme Komisyonu, 26 Eylül 1999 *Ulucanlar Cezaevi Raporu* (TBMM 2000) <<https://tbmm.gov.tr/komisyon/insanhaklari/belge/ulucanlar.pdf>> accessed 17 March 2020.

However, the way this bloody event is represented is highly controversial. There are three first-page coverages of the massacre from different newspapers exhibited on the walls of the museum. In Figure 1, the headline is quite biased against the prisoners. It reads ‘Again prison, again bloodshed’ under which the account of the event is given with pejorative expressions such as ‘leftist militants’. The highlighted subtitles are ‘the shot of the commander and the officer made things violent’; ‘93 staff were taken hostage by the inmates’; ‘the commander got injured’. It is implied that it was the prisoners who started the riot, it was the injury of the commander which made things worse and the prisoners were leftist militants in collaboration with other prisons.



Figures 2-4 Newspaper pages 1-3 covering Ulucanlar massacre

Figure 2 shows a biased page as well. The headline reads ‘the mastermind of the riot is Bayrampaşa’ and it is followed by the subheadings: ‘The police had warned one month earlier’; ‘All prisons are occupied by militants’. In Figure 3, the headline is ‘Deaths are obscure’, followed by the subheading ‘76 staff in hostage’. Besides, in the column, some parts are highlighted in bold such as ‘a tunnel was detected 1 month ago’.

Without doubt, the selectivity of the representation reflects and reproduces the official discourse which regards leftist people as militants and terrorists and hints that their killing is legitimate as they are already violent and aggressive terrorists. No detailed account of

the event is provided with any caption nor are the prisoners who were killed mentioned by name. They appear on the headlines as numbers and ‘leftist militants’. However, they were killed either by short-distance shots; by suffocation with tear gas or by being beaten up.<sup>166</sup> ‘I lost ten friends, I carried the corpses with my bare hands’<sup>167</sup> says Murat Özçelik who was there during the massacre.

For the prisoners I interviewed, the memory of Ulucanlar is plagued with the trauma of the massacre and so is the museum because of the non-visibility of it. Nergiz Uzun is one of them:

The last time I saw the museum was the next day of the massacre. When I finally went to the museum after years, I saw that no sign was left nor were there any explanation to inform the visitors about it. I would consider it as a ‘museum’ if it had not been closed with that massacre. But now, for me, it is just a place which reminds me of the fact that my friends were killed violently for which no one was prosecuted. It is a ‘monument of impunity’.<sup>168</sup>

The non-representation of the massacre in the museum and no mention of the ten people who were killed there is the point where the state fails the sincerity test according to the ex-prisoners. Turgut Türksoy remembers the huge difference between the prison he visited during the exhibition and the prison as the museum by saying:

When Ulucanlar was opened to the visits for the first time, it was the prison where we stayed. It used to reflect the Ulucanlar massacre entirely: the burnt wards, the blood on the walls and the floor although they had cleaned it right after. But now the place is made-up. The young generations cannot have an idea about what kind of a hell this place was by visiting the museum. In this sense, I think the museum (in quotation) has been transformed not to reflect the tyranny of the era.<sup>169</sup>

The invisibility of an atrocity of such scale, for Veli Saçılık, is the evidence of the efforts to cover things up with the veil the museum provides, ‘When you visit the museum, you cannot see or know that

<sup>166</sup> Murat Özçelik, *Bir Katliamın Tanıklığı: Ölücanlar Belgeseli* (2010).

<sup>167</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> Interview with Nergiz Uzun, Ex-prisoner (Ankara, Turkey, May 2019).

<sup>169</sup> Interview with Turgut Türksoy, Ex-prisoner (Ankara, Turkey, May 2019).

people were killed there. This is the proof that the truth is hidden. You cannot find any traces of those who were killed [in the massacre]'.<sup>170</sup>

What makes Ulucanlar historically and politically significant is the executions of prominent figures there, which, similarly, are represented in a highly controversial way. 18 executions are claimed to have taken place in Ulucanlar. Deniz Gezmiş, Hüseyin İnan, Yusuf Aslan,<sup>171</sup> Erdal Eren<sup>172</sup> and Necdet Adalı<sup>173</sup> are the most prominent figures among them. İskilipli Atıf Hoca, a religious figure of a highly contested historical significance, is claimed to be hanged there however he was not<sup>174</sup> (to be discussed in detail in the forthcoming part). The gallows with which Gezmiş, İnan and Aslan were executed is exhibited within an iron cage, right next to which the list of those executed there written on a plaque (Figure 5). It is the top attraction of the museum as many people visit Ulucanlar just to see it, like pilgrims visiting a sacred place. It is what *Mona Lisa* is to the Louvre Museum. However, it has been a subject of much debate and fight between the museum and the Revolutionary 78s Association.<sup>175</sup> The association made a declaration that they were going to steal the gallows as they are strongly against the heritage of their comrades being commercialised. Upon this, the museum authorities put the gallows in an iron cage.<sup>176</sup> Ironically however, on the website of the museum, the authorities brag saying that 'We jailed the gallows for life!'.<sup>177</sup> The emphasis on the 'we' refers to Altındağ Municipality that takes the credit for everything.

<sup>170</sup> Interview with Veli Saçılık, Ex-prisoner (Ankara, Turkey, May 2019).

<sup>171</sup> They are leftist revolutionary students who were executed for their political activism in 1972. Since then they have become symbols of the leftist political identity. Deniz Gezmiş and his friends are compared to Che Guevara and his companions.

<sup>172</sup> Erdal Eren was a leftist high school student who was accused of killing a soldier. He was hanged when he was only 16. There are many songs dedicated to him.

<sup>173</sup> The first leftist activist who was executed by the 12 September military junta.

<sup>174</sup> Candan (n 156).

<sup>175</sup> An association that consists of political activists. They have a Shame Museum which is an example of counter memory.

<sup>176</sup> Radikal, 'Dünyanın En İyi Korunan Darağacı' (*Radikal*, 3 September 2011) <[www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/dunyanin-en-iyi-korunan-daragaci-1062168/](http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/dunyanin-en-iyi-korunan-daragaci-1062168/)> accessed 16 June 2019.

<sup>177</sup> Ulucanlar Cezaevi Müzesi (n 154).





*Figure 5 the gallows by which important political-religious figures are said to have been hanged*

Jailbreaks constitute an important part of the history of the museum as well. Many tunnels were dug<sup>178</sup> and many jailbreak attempts were made. Some of them were successful, however some of them failed, at the end of which came cell penalties with torture and even execution. Saçılık reminds that Necdet Adalı was executed when he attempted a jailbreak:

They should tell the stories of those who attempted to escape, those who were caught up while doing so. How many people escaped? Why don't you tell their stories, they are like stories in the novels! Write the story of Adalı who fell off the wall while escaping after which he was executed! Why do not you!<sup>179</sup>

However, there is not a single hint about that. This was not even included in Adalı's biography. Taner Akçam<sup>180</sup> is another person who escaped from the prison by digging a tunnel and succeeded,<sup>181</sup> yet this is not mentioned either, although he is one of the more famous inmates highlighted with a biography in the museum.

<sup>178</sup> Hüseyin Esentürk, 'Ulucanlara Dair' [2011] Mimarlar Odası Ankara Şubesi Bülteni 37.

<sup>179</sup> Saçılık (n 169).

<sup>180</sup> Taner Akçam is a prominent historian and writer of international reputation.

<sup>181</sup> Can Dündar, 'Bir Rüya Gördü Hapisten Kaçtı' *Milliyet* (9 January 2002) <[ww2.milliyet.com.tr/yazarlar/can-dundar/bir-ruya-gordu-hapisten-kacti-5228455](http://ww2.milliyet.com.tr/yazarlar/can-dundar/bir-ruya-gordu-hapisten-kacti-5228455)> accessed 17 June 2019.



### 6.3.2 Representation of the victims

The museum tour starts with the 9th and 10th wards, known as Hilton ward (Figure 6), after a couple of minutes walking from the entrance. This part housed many famous writers, politicians, poets and journalists. It is a two-storey ward with a view on the second floor, which is why it is called the Hilton. When you climb up the metal stairs to reach the second floor, you see the picture of Bülent Ecevit (Figure 7), the former president, in front of the bunks among other prominent figures.



*Figure 6 the Hilton ward which hosted important figures as inmates*



*Figure 7 Picture showing the politician Bülent Ecevit who stayed at Hilton Ward*

For the prisoners I interviewed, the representation of the victims is the most problematic part of the museum. The common opinion on this is that only famous people were highlighted and the ordinary prisoners were left out. Uzun says:

The museum is designed with an eye from outside. It is like as if only famous writers, artists and politicians stayed there (...) While those were highlighted, ordinary prisoners were rendered invisible (...) The museum does not bring any recognition for the ordinary prisoners which famous people already have. [Ordinary prisoners] are not essential element of the museum as they are still seen as ‘terrorists’ by society and state.<sup>182</sup>

Uzun points to the very fact that the museum does not fulfil its most important mission which is the recognition it is supposed to bring to the victims. She underlines one very important point: ‘I think, by highlighting the famous people, a message is given: “it is inevitable to end up in jail for those who are engaged in arts and politics”’.<sup>183</sup>

Kerem Okur tells an anecdote of what he overheard during his second visit to the museum: ‘When I visited the museum for the second time, I listened to the people there. A man was telling his son: “You see what happens if you commit a crime?” Yes, this really happened!’.<sup>184</sup>

As it is going to be seen in the following chapter, this is very much in line with what some of the museum visitors think about the message conveyed by the museum.

According to Alp Altınörs:

If you launch Ulucanlar as a ‘criminal’ rather than a ‘political’ place, if you annihilate the existence of political prisoners or reduce them to a few famous people, it means that you are doing nothing for confrontation (...) A museum where there is no picture of those who were killed by shooting and torture during Ulucanlar massacre is not a museum but a lie.<sup>185</sup>

Altınörs implies that by featuring the famous figures of a distant past, the real character of the political struggle is mitigated. So, it is intentional and part of the politics behind the representation.

<sup>182</sup> Uzun (n 167).

<sup>183</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> Interview with Kerem Okur (Ankara, Turkey, May 2019).

<sup>185</sup> Interview with Alp Altınörs (Ankara, Turkey, May 2019).

Similarly, Saçılık thinks that the museum is not inclusive in representation: 'A list of the prisoners could have been made or a memory book. Or they could have put those on their website with many other things to keep the memory of Ulucanlar alive'.<sup>186</sup>

However, not only within the museum, but on the website as well, there is no name or mention of the 'ordinary' prisoners. Saçılık points out that the lack of visibility does not change the fact that ordinary prisoners were killed in the prison with torture:

If you are telling the history of the museum, you have to mention those who were tortured there, you have to mention those who were killed there. For example, there is not a list of those who were killed in the prison but just a list of the executed. However, many people entered the prison alive and went out dead. But you cannot have an idea about that when you visit the museum.<sup>187</sup>

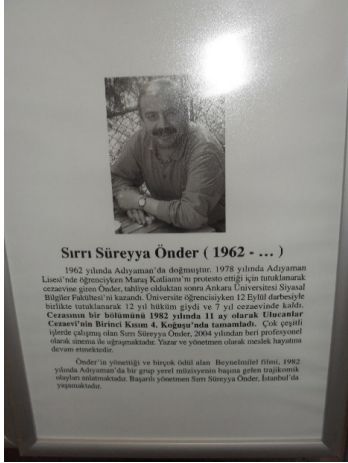
5th and 6th wards are where political prisoners were held. In front of each bunk, there is a picture and a short biography of a prisoner. It is like a gallery of prominent political figures both from the right and left wings who left their mark on Turkish political history. This is the realm where the politics of representation is practiced the most and the museum is turned into a battleground where a symbolic war is fought between two ideologies. Based on my personal observations over the past few years, the changes made within the museum show that the war has been going on with manoeuvres applied strategically by the museum. One example of this is the picture of Sırrı Süreyya Önder<sup>188</sup> which was removed from the ward it used to be exhibited. Önder was writing a column on *Radikal*, an oppositional newspaper, for which he gained an immense popularity and was chosen as an MP. His popularity increased day by day and with the support and admiration he got from all segments of the society, he became one of the key actors in the peace negotiations between PKK and the government. On one of my visits to the museum on 29 July 2011, I had taken the picture of Önder's biography (Figure 8) on one of the bunks which, however, I could not find on my later visits. Apparently, the museum has removed his picture

<sup>186</sup> Saçılık (n 169).

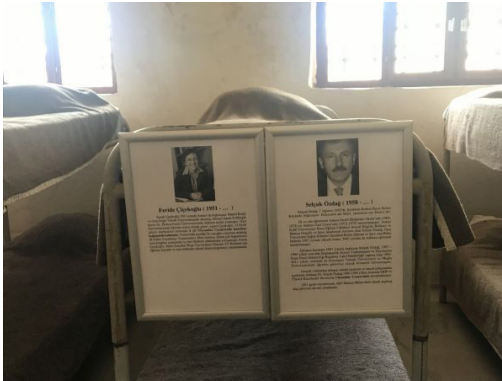
<sup>187</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> An independent MP elected in 2011 backed by pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party. He is one of the most popular and liked political figures. He is famous for his sense of humour and movies.

which, when I found out, inspired me to write this thesis. While the present study is in progress, my discovery went on the national news, upon my disclosure of it to one of the interviewees. What is interesting is that Önder's picture is replaced with that of former AKP deputy leader Selçuk Özdağ<sup>189</sup> (Figure 9). Ironically, Önder has been sentenced to three years and he is currently staying in an F type solitary cell, which he was advocating against.



*Figure 8 Picture and biography of Sırrı Süreyya Önder before it was removed from the museum*



*Figure 9 Picture of Selçuk Özdağ, MP of AKP, whose biography was replaced by that of Sırrı Süreyya Önder*

<sup>189</sup> Serkan Alan, 'Sırrı Süreyya Önder'in Adı Ulucanlar'dan Silindi' *Gazeteduvar* (17 May 2019) <<https://gazeteduvar.com.tr/gundem/2019/05/17/sirri-sureyya-onderin-ismi-ulucanlar-muzesinden-kaldirildi/>> accessed 17 June 2019.

İskilipli Atıf Hoca is another example of this manoeuvre. He was a religious scholar who wrote a pamphlet with the name Frankish Mimicry and Hat in which he criticised the Hat Act<sup>190</sup> and condemned the western hat for being a sign of infidelity against Islam. When the revolts broke out by İslamists against the act in many cities, being held responsible for them, İskilipli Atıf was arrested and put on trial in an independence tribunal –a special court established during the War of Independence to prosecute people who are against independence-, as a result of which he was executed.<sup>191</sup> His execution made him a martyr for those who are opponents of Kemalist reforms as many of them think that he did not even defend himself during the trial and chose death.<sup>192</sup> He was imprisoned in Ulucanlar for a very short time during his trial however, contrary to common belief, Ulucanlar is not where he was hanged; it was Samanpazarı Square where the execution took place publicly.<sup>193</sup> Hanged in 1926, his name appears as the first on the list of the executed prisoners that is ordered chronologically right next to the sacred gallows (Figure 10). A genuine artefact of Deniz Gezmiş and his companions' execution, the gallows, is associated with the leftist struggle and suffering by the proponents and thus is surrounded with a sacred aura. However, by claiming İskilipli Atıf's execution in Ulucanlar, this sacred aura is subtly balanced with that of İslamic spirit, a strategy claiming a past suffering which political İslam has adopted as a way of legitimacy for a long time. It is not a coincidence that two years after the museum's inauguration, Atıf's name was given to a hospital in his hometown Çorum.<sup>194</sup>

<sup>190</sup> The Hat Act of 1925 banned all kinds of Islamic headwear, allowing only the western hat.

<sup>191</sup> Necdet Aysal, 'Tanzimattan Cumhuriyete Giyim ve Kuşamda Çağdaşlaşma Hareketleri' (2011) 10 Çağdaş Türkiye Tarihi Araştırmaları Dergisi 3.

<sup>192</sup> Behlül Özkan, 'Turkey's Islamism: From Power-Sharing to Political Incumbency' (2015) 14 Turkish Policy Quarterly 71, 74 <[www.turkishpolicy.com](http://www.turkishpolicy.com)> accessed 3 November 2019.

<sup>193</sup> Rahmi Turan, 'İskilipli Atıf Hoca Olayı!' *Hürriyet* (5 December 2011) <[www.hurriyet.com.tr/iskilipli-atif-hoca-olayi-19392250](http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/iskilipli-atif-hoca-olayi-19392250)> accessed 17 June 2019.

<sup>194</sup> 'İskilipli Atıf Hoca'ya İade-i İtibar' (*CNN Türk*, 24 February 2012) <<https://cnnturk.com/2012/turkiye/02/24/iskilipli.atif.hocaya.iade.i.itibar/650565.0/index.html>> accessed 17 June 2019.



*Figure 10 the list of the people who were executed at Ulucanlar Prison*

The politics practiced over the political figures can be traced further. The poems by two poets of utmost significance of the leftist and conservative ideology, Necip Fazıl and Nazım Hikmet, are inscribed on the walls of the part that turned into Art Street within the museum. Contemporaries of each other, Fazıl and Hikmet represent the leftist and rightist-İslamist ideology. Hikmet was a devoted communist for which he was prosecuted and jailed for decades. He continued his life in exile, in Russia, until he died of a heart attack there. He was buried in Moscow as his Turkish citizenship was revoked. On the other hand, Fazıl is the representative of Turkish-İslamist ideology which turned into a political movement in recent Turkish history. He was a fierce critic of secularism embraced by the Republic, which he was prosecuted for and jailed several times. A follower of Fazıl's school, Erdoğan has said that he is 'walking on his path alongside him' with the inspiration he gets from his life and works which he describes as his 'guide'.<sup>195</sup> The selection of the poems is worth mentioning from this perspective: both of the poems are about prison experience however, while Hikmet's poem sounds highly romantic, describing the joy of an inmate enjoying the sunshine and the sky during his fresh-air break in prison (Figure

<sup>195</sup> Sean R Singer, 'Erdoğan's Muse: The School of Necip Fazıl Kisakurek' (2013) 176 World Affairs 81, 82.

11), Fazıl's poem is more politically-oriented, sounding like a slogan: 'Tomorrow, for sure, is ours, is ours/ the sun, rising or sinking, and the eternity is ours' (Figure 12). Coincidence or not, Erdoğan is obsessed with this specific poem so much that he has quoted it multiple times in rallies, party congresses and even posted it on his Facebook<sup>196</sup> and Twitter<sup>197</sup> accounts (the latter being posted on the 10th anniversary of his coming to power). Positioned side by side, the poems stand in a stark contrast with each other inviting the visitors to reflect that no matter how contrasting the ideologies are, the suffering was experienced in the same way. It can be claimed that this is one of the spheres where the emotions of the visitors are appealed to, with the unity discourse conveyed by this strategy. This, pretty much, goes hand in hand with the policy AKP adopted in the 2000s which is considered as the extension of the reconciliation by mixing it up strategy (*karıştır barıştır*)<sup>198</sup> by those who are critical of it. The policy refers to the strategy adopted by the 1980 military junta, which holds the imprisonment of people of different ideologies within same wards. The restoration of Hikmet's citizenship officially in 2009,<sup>199</sup> just before the inauguration of the museum, can be seen as an extension of this policy as well. Okur refers to the poems saying, 'Putting Nazım Hikmet's poem on one side and Necip Fazıl on the other, they pretend that they are democratic however they are absurd, incoherent and politically opportunist and this is an insult to reasonable people'.<sup>200</sup>

He is aware of the fact that as a product of this very specific era, the politics behind the museum is in line with the official discourse which contends that right versus left conflict plagued the Turkish political life as a result of which everyone suffered equally, overshadowing the state's responsibility.

<sup>196</sup> Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, 'Mehmed'im, Sevinin, Başlar Yüksekte!' (Facebook, 17 September 2019) <<https://facebook.com/RTErdoğan/posts/10156982942808577/>> accessed 3 November 2019.

<sup>197</sup> Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, 'Sanma Bu Tekerlek Kalır Tümsekte, Yarın Elbet Bizim, Elbet Bizimdir.' (Twitter, 3 November 2012) <<https://twitter.com/rterdoğan/status/264758031991046144?lang=en>> accessed 3 November 2019.

<sup>198</sup> According to this strategy, the 1980 military junta put rightist and leftist prisoners in the same wards to reconcile them however, when violence levels increased, it was cancelled.

<sup>199</sup> 'Nazım Hikmet Resmen Türk Vatandaşı' (Radikal, 2009) <<http://radikal.com.tr/turkiye/nazim-hikmet-resmen-turk-vatandasi-916392/>> accessed 17 June 2019.

<sup>200</sup> Okur (n 183).





Figure 11 the wall on which the poem by Nazım Hikmet is inscribed

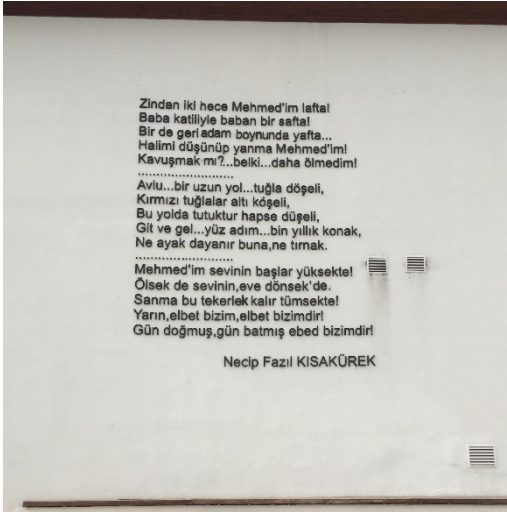


Figure 12 the wall on which the poem by Necip Fazıl is inscribed



### 6.3.3 Structural changes made in the museum

Despite the authenticity claims by the authorities, important changes have been made both during the transformation process and in the aftermath of the inauguration. Indeed, as stated above, the museum seems to be still in the making with remarkable omissions or additions of ideological significance. Eight years after the inauguration, a new ward, which was originally kept as a film set, has been opened to the visitors. The 2nd ward, as they call it, stands out among the others with the Islamic theme it displays (Figure 13). There is a wax mannequin praying on a piece of rug, his hands open, just in the middle of the room. Another one is reading the Koran on his bed. What is interesting about the latter is that his moustache implies that he is an *ülkücü*, a name given to Turkish nationalists who adopt a certain image with their hair, moustaches and clothing to show their political orientation. This is not coincidence as the personal belongings of Muhsin Yazıcıoğlu, Ali Bülent Orkan and Ahmet Tevfik Ozan, very important Turkish nationalist figures, are exhibited in this room. Compared to the other wards, this one is not only much neater and organised but also furnished with more stuff, such as a kitchen counter and the TV. Veysel Tiryaki, Altındağ mayor, states that ‘the museums are dynamic places so we are making additions to the museum to attract more visitors’.<sup>201</sup> It can be argued that the 2nd ward has been opened to balance the 6th ward which is marked with a mythicized leftist aura by Deniz Gezmiş’s personal belongings and the other important leftist political figures.

<sup>201</sup> ‘Ulucanlar Cezaevi Müzesi’nde Yeni Koğuş Ziyarete Açıldı’ (*Milliyet*, 2018) <<http://milliyet.com.tr/ulucanlar-cezaevi-muzesi-nde-yeni-kogus-ankara-yerelhaber-2679510/>> accessed 18 June 2019.



*Figure 13 the 2nd Ward which has been opened eight years after the museum's inauguration*

For the ex-prisoners, the changes made in the museum have distorted the authenticity to a great extent. One point almost all the interviewed ex-prisoners touched upon is the demolition of the women's ward. They think that it is a major change made in the museum which is part of the 'intentional attempt of erasing of the real memory'<sup>202</sup> and problematises the representation of the victims. Hüseyin Esentürk says: 'it is like not a single woman ever stayed there! They did! As much as men, the most intellectual women of this country'.<sup>203</sup> For Altınörs, it was one of the most authentic parts of the prison and Saçılık reminds that it is the part where the iconic *Uçurtmayı Vurmasınlar* movie was shot: 'How could you do that? It is nothing but an assault to the memory! When you watch the movie, you can already see that the museum has nothing to do with what it is now'.<sup>204</sup>

<sup>202</sup> Altınörs (n 184).

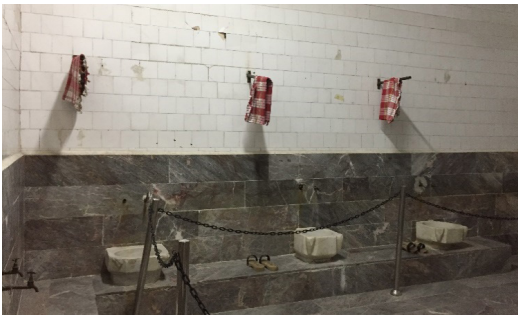
<sup>203</sup> Interview with Hüseyin Esentürk, Ex-prisoner (Ankara, Turkey, May 2019).

<sup>204</sup> Saçılık (n 169).

The *hamam* (bath) is another place of utmost significance as some inmates were killed there through torture. Apparently, it was used as an alternative spot for torture where ‘people were beaten up with nail-studded board[s] and killed’ which is why ‘it was not just a bath’.<sup>205</sup> In the layout of the museum, however, torture is represented as something which just took place in the solitary cells where the cries, screams and beatings are conveyed with a sound effect to the visitors. The bath, as an off-the-record spot, is just one of the dark secrets of the history of Ulucanlar. Altınörs says:

Ulucanlar massacre occupies a critical point in the prison’s history and where bath was used as the spot for torture yet there is no single mention of it. So, when I visited the museum, I wrote on the wall of the bath: ‘Here the prisoners were tortured; the captives were slaughtered’. But it is those who made the museum who should have done this: they should have written this on a plaque in the bath.<sup>206</sup>

As a place of death and torture, the bath is part of the memory of the prisoners which they cannot track down in the museum. Altınörs claims that the bath had to be restored as a whole as it was one of the main places for torture. However what came out of this restoration is just an ‘oriental hamam’<sup>207</sup> (Figures 14-15). For Barbaros Yılmaz, the current bath in the museum does not provide any space for anchoring their memories. He thinks that this can only happen where one can remember their sufferings, which however is not possible in this restored bath: ‘When you go into the bath you see that it is not the place where all of these happened and when you tell all about it to people they get surprised and ask: Did all these really happen there? They are right, because no single sign has been left’.<sup>208</sup>



*Figure 14 the hamam (bath) after the restoration*

<sup>205</sup> Saçılık (n 169).

<sup>206</sup> Altınörs (n 182).

<sup>207</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>208</sup> Interview with Barbaros Yılmaz, Ex-prisoner (Ankara, Turkey, May 2019).



*Figure 15 the hamam (bath) after the restoration*

Graffiti is what most of the prisoners mentioned as part of their memory of Ulucanlar. In fact, graffiti has been an important component of the political activism for both left and right-wing movements. As a prison full of political prisoners, no doubt Ulucanlar had walls covered with it. A direct expression of the political orientation of the prisoners, graffiti is like their signature: ‘The history written with blood, cannot be erased’ and ‘The workers of the world, unite!’ are just two that Özçelik mentions.<sup>209</sup> İsmail Beşikçi gives another interesting example: ‘The walls of the ward I was staying in were covered with slogans, accusing and criticizing the prison authorities, and they were written by the faeces of the prisoners’.<sup>210</sup>

Indeed, there is a record of what the walls of the wards looked like before the restoration thanks to the pictures taken by TMMOB in the pre-transformation phase. It is obvious that the walls have been painted to erase the graffiti which can tell a lot about the prison. Altınörs expressed his anger saying that, ‘There were symbols of the revolution and pictures of those who were killed in their revolutionary struggle on the walls. But they erased all of them. In no way, can a person who lived there, can feel they belonged in there’.<sup>211</sup>

<sup>209</sup> Interview with Murat Özçelik, Ex-prisoner (Ankara, Turkey, May 2019).

<sup>210</sup> Interview with İsmail Beşikçi, Ex-prisoner (Ankara, Turkey May 2019).

<sup>211</sup> Altınörs (n 184).

Structural changes made in the museum distorted its authenticity to a great extent according to the ex-prisoners. Özçelik is one of those who had the chance to see the prison before it was transformed into the museum. He made a documentary there before the restorations started. However, when he went back to the prison to shoot his missing scenes, after it had been turned into a museum, he gave up: ‘I did not even open my camera, I gave up upon seeing the changes made’.<sup>212</sup>

#### 6.4 REACTIONS OF THE EX-PRISONERS TO THE MUSEUM

##### 6.4.1 *The legacy of the ex-prisoners’ memory in the museum*

All of the interviewees were on the same page regarding the way the museum ‘played’ with the legacy of their memory. They all think that it does not reflect their memory in Ulucanlar, which almost all of them described as an ‘assault’ by those who played with it.

‘I almost found nothing from myself and from the era I stayed there’<sup>213</sup> says Okur. Altınörs echoes his remarks: ‘This is not the prison I stayed in. Seriously, no one who stayed there can feel any kind of sense of belonging to the place’.<sup>214</sup> For Yılmaz, this is an assault but not only to memory: ‘You really see what kind of an assault this is to one’s recollection, consciousness, and history (...) You go there and just say “it was not this!”’.<sup>215</sup>

It can be seen that the ex-prisoners are cynical of the museum and they do not have a sense of belonging to the place for several reasons. Following the patterns of this feeling of disconnectedness within the interviews, I categorised the reasons as: the reflection of the leftist identity, the recreation of a reality of a distant past and the politics behind these.

The leftist identity, which has always been regarded as the threat by the state and labelled as terrorist, is central to the memory discussions of the informants. An interesting pattern in their narration of it holds that they never see themselves as victims but fighters against the state: ‘I do not accept being called as victim. We rebelled against their order willingly. The terrorist label they put on us is an honour for us. We are not victims but we are fighters and so they keep punishing us’.<sup>216</sup>

<sup>212</sup> Özçelik (n 164).

<sup>213</sup> Okur (n 183).

<sup>214</sup> Altınörs (n 184).

<sup>215</sup> Yılmaz (n 207).

<sup>216</sup> Türksöy (n 168).

Cemalettin Canlı thinks in the same way: 'I don't see this as a victimisation. After all we were part of a fight and they just destroy the means of the fight and that's OK'.<sup>217</sup> Altınörs thinks that the very existence of the (leftist) political prisoners is rendered invisible by the authorities and Uzun explains that that is because the political prisoners 'are still terrorist[s] in the eye of the public and the state which is why they are not the essential element of the museum'.<sup>218</sup>

While this is the case with the prisoners' perception of their identity, however, most of the informants think that a victimisation narrative has been created with a bathetic portrayal of the leftist political prisoners in the museum. Canlı says: 'Those things (...) the prisoner figures made of wax in shackles and those others (...) I don't know what to call them. Arabesque or kitsch (...) It is nonsense and very much in line with the rightist mentality in Turkey'.<sup>219</sup>

For Altınörs this is made intentionally to undermine the leftist struggle: 'The atmosphere created in the museum is the one which does not tell the story of those who resisted for freedom but of those who are doomed'.<sup>220</sup>

Okur says that a message is given that leftists paid for what they did: 'The museum is presented as place where the leftists were staying whining and crying (...) the place looks sterile yet the prisoners look [a] mess, desperate, doomed and melancholic' and he adds: 'I don't recall even one crying person. They were either swearing or chanting. No one defined themselves as "doomed" as they already knew what they would going through. They knew very well why they were there and this applies to all political prisoners'.<sup>221</sup>

Another point the prisoners oppose strongly is that they were represented as criminals in the museum narrative. They do not consider themselves as criminals. Okur says: 'I never considered myself as a prisoner who is serving his time in prison. I was a captive but not a convict. And not criminal at all'.<sup>222</sup> However, he recalls overhearing a man telling his son that 'See, if you commit a crime, you will end up in jail like this' and he realised that they were regarded as criminals by the visitors.

<sup>217</sup> Interview with Cemalettin Canlı, Ex-prisoner (Ankara, Turkey, May 2019).

<sup>218</sup> Uzun (n 167).

<sup>219</sup> Canlı (n 216).

<sup>220</sup> Altınörs (n 184).

<sup>221</sup> Okur (n 183).

<sup>222</sup> *ibid.*

The reason why the interviewees oppose this criminal image created in the museum is the status they thought they had as political prisoners. They all agree that it is a privileged status. Canlı holds that: 'being political prisoner had a significance and privilege back then. With the belief we derived from our legitimacy, we never felt like a convict'.<sup>223</sup> However, for some, a realisation comes with a disappointment. Özçelik says 'We dared to fight the capitalism in that era and we thought that our "story" is very valuable and we lived with this feeling. However, when I was out, I realized that it does not mean a lot to others. Those who visit the museum think that it is just a jail where criminals end up'.<sup>224</sup>

Okur<sup>225</sup> thinks that the museum does not have anything to do with the legacy of their memory as they, the political prisoners, had created 'a completely different world which did not surrender to the oppressors'. In his and other informants' memories, Ulucanlar was 'a political-academic' school in which 'they felt way more free than people did outside'. Okur expresses his dissatisfaction by saying: 'it was the best school in Turkey and yet they turned it into a prison for the doomed'. Türksoy claims that to mitigate the political atmosphere and trivialise their struggle they intentionally 'presented [the prison] as a place where a handful of youth ended up after adventures'.<sup>226</sup>

As the leftist political orientation is central to the informants' identity, the problematic representation of it in the museum constitutes the main problem from their perspective. It can be recalled from earlier discussions that memory is deeply connected with identity and 'a shared past creates a shared memory which binds group together' as Halbwachs contends.<sup>227</sup> The shared memory thus gives an idea about the dynamics of group identity, which in this case is marked with the rejection of victim discourse, although technically it means the violation of their rights. It is clear that the leftist discourse is still central to the ex-prisoners' narratives and their perceptions: the fact that their leftist identity is overlooked, trivialised and weakened by a 'desperate representation' in the museum constitutes the main reason for their dissatisfaction with it.

The second pattern of dissatisfaction is the 'fictional reality of a distant past' created in the museum. Almost all the informants asserted that

<sup>223</sup> Canlı (n 216).

<sup>224</sup> Özçelik (n 164).

<sup>225</sup> Okur (n 183).

<sup>226</sup> Türksoy (n 168).

<sup>227</sup> Nicolas Russell, 'Collective Memory before and after Halbwachs' (2014) 79 *The French Review* 792.



the UPM does not ‘tell their story’ but it reflects a distant past which is ‘less dangerous’ to exhibit. Canlı states: ‘The period museum reflects is [the] 70s. It does have to do anything for those who stayed there in [the] 80s or 90s (...) It might be a memory place for some but not for me’.<sup>228</sup> Altınörs<sup>229</sup> is the other interviewee to point to this fact: ‘When you visit the museum you see that they accept that torture happened there but this is presented as if it is something from [the] 50s or 60s, from a distant past’ and he further states that while ‘it is true that people were tortured back then however it is the post-1980 coup which paved the way for a museum’. That is said, the atrocities committed after the 1980 coup are not included in the museum’s narrative which, ironically, is its *raison d’être*. Saçılık says: ‘Those who were tortured and killed in the recent past are forgotten but those from distant past such as Nazım Hikmet, who are less dangerous, are mentioned’.<sup>230</sup>

All the informants agree on the fact that a fictional reality was created in the museum which does not follow their memory. As a part of this recreation what most of them complain about is that the prison was presented as a comfortable and ‘sterile’ place, which it actually was not back when they were there. Beşikçi says: ‘the walls look spotless, the wards bright and the beds normal’.<sup>231</sup> Okur recalls the prison as a place which greeted them saying: “Now you are in a disgusting world and we will not show you any good in here!” [However] they turned the prison into a comfortable, spacious place but in fact, every kind of ugliness used to slap us in the face back then’.<sup>232</sup>

Turgut Türksoy was in Ulucanlar in the 1990s which is the worst period in its history according to many people. He says ‘Not only had me but everyone who guided their families to the museum reacted to the changes. A clean environment where people are playing saz and cooking; full of books; we have TV and radio. However, everything was prohibited towards the end. Even cooking’.<sup>233</sup>

It is obvious that every informant is telling their own Ulucanlar experience and in this sense, the memory, naturally, is multiple. While Altınörs and Okur state that they had created their own habitat with their own rules and routines in Ulucanlar where they lived with their dignity,

<sup>228</sup> Canlı (n 216).

<sup>229</sup> Altınörs (n 184).

<sup>230</sup> Saçılık (n 169).

<sup>231</sup> Beşikçi (n 209).

<sup>232</sup> Okur (n 183).

<sup>233</sup> Türksoy (n 168).



Türksoy, Saçılık, Canlı, Uzun and Esentürk recall Ulucanlar as a horrible place. Altınörs states that it was a prison with an open space where they could walk around freely yet Yılmaz recalls it as a disclosed place: ‘It was a place where all doors were shut close[d]. The biggest difference of Ulucanlar [from the other prisons] was that it had many doors. Doors that open and close constantly (...).’<sup>234</sup>

This is because of the policies and security measures adopted by the prison authorities in different periods. Although it is technically impossible to have a coherent representation of all those memories, the things all the informants underline point to the distortion of the basic elements of the prison, such as the wards, walls and the yard. Saçılık claims that ‘the reality is reproduced but as a lie’ and he emphasises the different feelings he had when he visited the prison before and after the transformation:

When I first visited Ulucanlar, it was not an abused place but rather a historical one. Visiting the place as it was revived the memories of our suffering in my heart: friendships, tortures and other memories were all revived, in a different consciousness though, as I was within a sense of reality. But then, we saw those memories were destroyed with the place.<sup>235</sup>

The reactions of the ex-prisoners to the museum is marked with the authenticity concern. Their disappointment over the distorted authenticity resonated in the same sentence: ‘This is not where I stayed’. Although it is the very place where prisoners spent their time for a while, they said that they could not trace and revive their memories as it is a totally different place now. Yılmaz says: ‘It makes you forget that you had lived there’ and he describes it as an ‘assault to one’s own consciousness’.<sup>236</sup> Esentürk says: ‘I am not impressed with it anymore’<sup>237</sup> while he was talking about his feelings during his visits. It is clear that their memories are fading and Ulucanlar, as a place of distorted authenticity, contributes to this dissolution. The intimacy between memory and place is very much linked to the authenticity which, in Ulucanlar’s case, is not palpable for even those who spent part of their lives there. Canlı says:

<sup>234</sup> Yılmaz (n 207).

<sup>235</sup> Saçılık (n 169).

<sup>236</sup> Yılmaz (n 207).

<sup>237</sup> Esentürk (n 202).

When I first went there after the big massacre, I saw that the airing yard was covered with grids (...) Some parts were burnt. They changed them all (...) But even looking at those [ruins of the massacre], you see yourself: your dreams, desires, your grief, your joy. I would like to see it as it was (...) I would be happy. I would have a story to tell and more importantly my story would have a setting. But they changed the setting of my story. And they tell a new story as if it is ours (...) I don't want to go there now; it does not mean anything to me.<sup>238</sup>

All my informants are aware of the politics behind the museum which they see as the main factor behind the structural changes and representation strategies. Canlı<sup>239</sup> says: 'The codes they have in mind [about us] still are those of "communist" discourse', so the fact that we, leftists, suffered does not mean anything for them'. It is those codes with which they 'rewrite the memory' – he says – with present concerns, such as 'the reforms adopted to improve the relationships with EU'. Then he adds: 'It is the state that made the massacre. It is the state that opened the museum and so, it reflects as much as it wants'.

The deep politics to the memory-making process creates a ground on which struggle over memory takes place between those in power and those whose memories are at stake. Putting it in Halbwachsian and Foucaultian terms, memory is a reconstruction of the past which is shaped by the concerns of the present and this happens within power relationships. The Ulucanlar narrative created by the state is presented as an authoritative truth and is put into circulation with the mediation of the museum. Ex-prisoners, however, challenge this hegemonic account by telling their own stories. They counter the dominant narrative with their own ways.

Esentürk is a member and one of the founders of the Revolutionist 78s Association (*78'liler Derneği*). He tells the counter-memory initiative they undertook:

We wanted to establish memorial museums and museums of democracy which tell the story of the official and alternative histories. Since 2010, we have exhibited everything related to the atrocities committed under the name of Museum of Shame. [We have exhibited] things, such as Deniz's coat, Erdal's jacket or Mahir's jumper.<sup>240</sup>

<sup>238</sup> Canlı (n 216).

<sup>239</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>240</sup> Esentürk (n 202).

Türksoy, a member of the association, claims that the state tries to whitewash itself by opening a memorial museum and cover things up but that the Museum of Shame offers much more in terms of confrontation: 'In the Museum of Shame, the names of all the perpetrators of torture and tools used for torture are exhibited. However, it would be much more effective if state had done that'.<sup>241</sup>

As discussed earlier, memory is a struggle between remembering and forgetting. The struggle to remember in Özçelik's case is marked with a sense of moral obligation:

As a film-maker, I made a documentary. I made it to pay my debt to those who were killed there (...) It was an attempt to come to terms with the past in an artistic way (...) It was my duty (...) It was something I did to save it from oblivion (...) I went through intense feelings while making the film. Multi-dimensional and emotional things (...) It is a long story but I had non-stop headaches during the editing process.<sup>242</sup>

No matter how traumatic it is, the ex-prisoners had an urge to remember and keep their memories alive in various ways. They embrace the memory of Ulucanlar, as they consider it as part of their identity; as a duty to their comrades who were killed there or as an extension of their struggle against the hegemony which still considers them as threat and thus excludes them from the authoritative narrative it creates. Remembering, from ex-prisoners' side, becomes a need and a ground on which they continue their political struggle.

#### *6.4.2 Emotional outcome of the museum in ex-prisoners*

When asked about their feelings, the interviewees were reluctant to give a detailed account of the emotional outcome the museum created in them. They either cut it short or preferred instead to elaborate on the legitimacy of their political stance. The leftist discourse was central to their discussions related to the museum: they did not only try to rationalise their reactions but they also avoid personalising their memories. They emphasised 'us' instead of 'me' and referred to the collective leftist identity. As a part of the critical leftist stance, the informants' reactions to the museum is marked with negative feelings which cannot be traced

<sup>241</sup> Türksoy (n 168).

<sup>242</sup> Özçelik (n 162).

on the sentence level as they said very little about it. But it is inevitably reflected with their general tone.

Anger is the most prominent pattern which stands out in the interviews. All of the informants feel angry either because they consider this memorialisation attempt as an ‘assault’ to their personal memory and to the history or because of the way the ex-prisoners, were represented in the museum narrative as ‘desperate’ or ‘melancholic’ or as ‘criminals’ rather than ‘political prisoners’. Saçılık says: ‘What I felt was not disrespect to my memories, but rather an assault’.<sup>243</sup> Okur is angry as the sufferings and torture are ignored in the museum: ‘In short, it fired me with anger’. Uzun feels the same: ‘During the visit it is painful, but in the long [term], it creates rage’.<sup>244</sup>

The trauma of the Ulucanlar massacre haunted those who witnessed it. They told how they felt intense. Özçelik is one of them: ‘On my visits to the prison during the temporary exhibition, I felt very intense (...) The things I went through were very tough’.<sup>245</sup> Saçılık says: ‘I was especially touched upon my visit to the bath where people were beaten to death’.<sup>246</sup> Türksoy explains:

I was guiding some friends to the museum. That’s why I hid my feelings for the sake of my duty. However, when we were on the spot of the executions and the bath, my eyes filled with tears. I feel the same now. The bath especially, has a unique place in my memory. It is where I helped a friend with escape. He died during a fight in Palestine. He was a senior medicine student. When I was in the bath, I had complicated feelings. I cannot express them neither orally nor verbally.<sup>247</sup>

The memory of the executions strikes Esentürk as well:

There is this poplar tree where all executions took place. It is 100 years old and it witnessed all of the hangings. It is alive and I get very emotional on that exact spot. Now, the museum does not affect me but when I am on that spot, I feel so overwhelmed with the gallows and the tree that I can hardly keep myself from crying.<sup>248</sup>

<sup>243</sup> Saçılık (n 167).

<sup>244</sup> Uzun (n 165).

<sup>245</sup> Özçelik (n 164).

<sup>246</sup> Saçılık (n 169).

<sup>247</sup> Türksoy (n 168).

<sup>248</sup> Esentürk (n 202).

Yılmaz is another witness of the massacre. Yet he did not express his sadness in sentences because he could not help crying during the interview. He had to cut it short.

The tone of the interviews is marked with disappointment which came with the realisation that the way people perceive the prisoners is different from how they see themselves. Many of the informants talked about the privileged status they think political prisoners have, yet they get disappointed upon seeing that it is not as they think it was. Canlı says: ‘Back then it was OK to be in prison. We were thinking that we were as cocky as the king of spades’.<sup>249</sup> Özçelik sounded disappointed as well; he thinks as a person of struggle, his story is not appreciated enough: ‘we used to think that our story was valued. We lived with this feeling and we paid for it. But when I went out I saw that it wasn’t’.<sup>250</sup>

The changes and restorations applied in the museum created a sense of disconnectedness in the prisoners. Because of the spatial distortion, the prisoners could not find the setting where they can anchor their memories and so the intimacy between the memory and place is broken. Yılmaz states: ‘You can confront the past only where you can remember your sufferings (...) But you go there and you end up saying “this is not it”. They did not leave a sign (...) It is painful’.<sup>251</sup> Similarly, Canlı says that he feels left out: ‘If I go there now, I cannot show anybody that “this is where we went to the bath”, “this is where we fought” or “this is where Deniz was hanged” (...) [Because] now it is something external’.<sup>252</sup> Altınörs mentions the same feeling: ‘I visited the museum as a visitor but not as a person who stayed there. Because it was not where I stayed’.<sup>253</sup>

The ex-prisoners say that they felt nostalgic when they visited the temporary exhibition. Özçelik recalls:

Ankara Castle could be seen from the prison. Our families or lovers were flying kites at certain hours as a way of communication. We used to watch it. It was a dream to go to that castle and watch Ankara back then. Because, it was almost impossible to get out of the prison alive (...) My emotions were intense upon my visit to it’.<sup>254</sup>

<sup>249</sup> Canlı (n 216).

<sup>250</sup> Özçelik (n 164).

<sup>251</sup> Yılmaz (n 205).

<sup>252</sup> Canlı (n 214).

<sup>253</sup> Altınörs (n 184).

<sup>254</sup> Özçelik (n 162).

However, the feeling of nostalgia is very much related to the authenticity of the place. Canlı says: 'If the place had been protected as it was, people would go there to remember and romanticise their memories. That would be nice. But they deprived us from the right to do it'.<sup>255</sup>

It is clear that there is a difference in the way prisoners felt upon their visits during the temporary exhibition and after its transformation into the museum. Many stated that they felt nostalgic during the temporary exhibition where no changes had made, yet the museum, as it is today, does not provide the atmosphere for a nostalgic recalling for the prisoners. Instead, it disconnects them from their past which they see as a violation of the 'right to memory'.

One positive feeling came out of the interviews was the triumphant feeling Altınörs and Saçılık said they had in prison. They mention this as a positive contribution of Ulucanlar, as a memory place, to their feelings. Altınörs says 'It feels good, after all, for a prisoner to go there and write: "You did not beat me but I did!" on the visitor book (...) We did defeat Ulucanlar and the museum is good in that it gives you this feeling. Yet beyond this, it is rather sour what you feel there'.<sup>256</sup>

Saçılık recalls his first visit by saying 'On my first visit, I went on the roof where guards were watching us from and where they threw gas on us. It was an amazing feeling for me: to go on a place which I had not ever been to, a place which I was watched from (...)'.<sup>257</sup>

### 6.4.3 *The function of Ulucanlar as a museum*

From the ex-prisoners' perspective, the museum is not a product of a confrontation attempt by the state but rather a 'pretension'<sup>258</sup> by which it has tried 'to cover the atrocities up'.<sup>259</sup> According to Canlı, the state 'creates a perception that it protects and respects the memory', however 'the state never does so if it does not have to'.<sup>260</sup> The reasons for this forced and false confrontation are various.

<sup>255</sup> Canlı (n 216).

<sup>256</sup> Altınörs (n 182).

<sup>257</sup> Saçılık (n 167).

<sup>258</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>259</sup> Altınörs (n 184).

<sup>260</sup> Canlı (n 216).

According to Altınörs, ‘Turkey is a country of atrocities and if the past is dug deeper, new atrocities and crimes will be added to the list’<sup>261</sup> so the state does not dare a real confrontation. For Saçılık, the state cannot afford a real confrontation in the museum ‘as that would lead to questioning of the current prisons which are death camps right now’.<sup>262</sup> Özçelik affirms this claim by saying: ‘They don’t want people to question things’.<sup>263</sup>

However, they think that the real motivation is totally different. Altınörs<sup>264</sup> reminds that ‘they wanted to give the message to the EU that they are coming to terms with the past’ and memorialisation of Ulucanlar is part of the ‘steps taken to improve the relationships with the EU’ which were false as well, as ‘they do not follow “Never Again” principle’. Seeking full membership to the EU is what triggered this false confrontation and the museum is its by-product. So, Ulucanlar, from the ex-prisoners’ perspective, does not fulfil its primary function which is confrontation.

As the confrontation is an empty gesture by the state, it does not provide any healing for the victims. Canlı says: ‘I do believe that this [a memorialisation] can provide healing under normal conditions. However, when the circumstances are abnormal, these [false attempts] reproduce rage and resistance’.<sup>265</sup>

From the ex-prisoners’ reactions it can be seen that the memorialisation of Ulucanlar does not bring any healing on the individual level. However, the interviewees are critical of its function to bring any good on the social level as well. Altınörs thinks that turning Ulucanlar into a museum is meaningless because ‘they opened F type solitary cells in the aftermath of Ulucanlar massacre which are way worse’.<sup>266</sup> Türksoy thinks that it does bring any reconciliation in any way as Turkey is going through the same cycle of the state violence of the 1980 military regime: ‘At this very moment, hundreds of people are on hunger strike in prisons and they are not allowed to see their families or lawyers. No matter how hard the state tries, we know that it is eye washing. This does not change the reality that 48 new prisons will be opened’.<sup>267</sup>

Most of the informants believe that a memorialisation attempt without prosecution of the perpetrators would not be enough. Uzun states:

<sup>261</sup> Altınörs (n 184).

<sup>262</sup> Saçılık (n 169).

<sup>263</sup> Özçelik (n 164).

<sup>264</sup> Altınörs (n 184).

<sup>265</sup> Canlı (n 216).

<sup>266</sup> Altınörs (n 184).

<sup>267</sup> Türksoy (n 168).

‘Without a legal confrontation a memorialisation of such can only show the pursuit of the legitimacy of the state (...) As the perpetrators were not prosecuted, Ulucanlar, is like the monument of the impunity’.<sup>268</sup> Altınörs agrees, ‘Only if the perpetrators of Ulucanlar massacre are hold accountable and punished, can we talk about justice and improvement. However, it was covered up and resulted in impunity (...) The museum on its own does not stop all these (...) The mentality is the same’.<sup>269</sup>

Another important function that Ulucanlar cannot fulfil as a museum is its educational role. Informants are of the idea that the museum does not provide information about how life was there. For Okur, it is because ‘everything was decontextualized and removed from its own reality’.<sup>270</sup> and ‘the relationship between the spatiality and memory is destroyed in the museum’<sup>271</sup> as Altınörs asserts. Uzun thinks that the memory function of the museum is really weak as ‘it does not include the objects, stuff or written explanations [related to the life the prisoners led] to those who do not have an idea about Ulucanlar’.<sup>272</sup>

Based on his personal observations while he was guiding people in the museum, Yılmaz had similar impressions: ‘There is nothing explanatory in the museum. The only way to tell what happened there is to provide [the visitors] with some written explanations. Because unfortunately, people I saw did not comprehend or perceive things fully in the museum’.<sup>273</sup> However, Özçelik’s observations while he was guiding people to the temporary exhibition point to the positive contributions of the authentic space to raise awareness:

Different people were visiting the museum. I guided many people back then from very different political opinions (...) Especially those who lived in that neighborhood (...) When the stories I told overlapped with the place, I could see the change in their perception and opinions. They said: ‘we heard guns and bombings but did not have an idea about what was going on inside. Now, we can understand. You were just close to us and we never knew it’ (...) When you tell the truth, there is a change. Because people cannot have an idea when you do not show them in the concrete. I could see the change in the level of awareness during those visits.<sup>274</sup>

<sup>268</sup> Uzun (n 167).

<sup>269</sup> Altınörs (n 184).

<sup>270</sup> Okur (n 183).

<sup>271</sup> Altınörs (n 184).

<sup>272</sup> Uzun (n 167).

<sup>273</sup> Yılmaz (n 207).

<sup>274</sup> Özçelik (n 164).



In Özçelik's interpretation, the prison before turning into a museum, had the power of the authenticity, the antaenic magic, which helped people to have a perception and awareness about the past. Accompanied by the authentic aura, Özçelik's unmediated first-hand narrations of his personal experiences reinforced the impact the place had on the visitors. 'This would not be possible otherwise' says Özçelik.

Awareness and historical consciousness, for Yılmaz, are 'what makes human a human'. He says: 'if such [memory] places are created as they should be, it would mean confrontation and an effort for non-repetition [of violations] (...) only if memory places provide [historical consciousness], people can say "never" [to the atrocities]. In that sense, memory places are a huge necessity'.<sup>275</sup>

In the light of the remarks made, as a place where the memory is decontextualised in a distorted spatiality, Ulucanlar falls short in fulfilling its functions as a museum. Although prisoners do believe that as a country with a negative past, 'a memory place is what Turkey needs'<sup>276</sup> and so a museum can contribute to raising awareness and promotion of the 'never again' principle, this should definitely be complementary to criminal justice. Impunity, ongoing state violence in the current prisons and the hostile state practice towards the dissidents render the museum as an empty gesture in the eyes of those who stayed there. A museum which is in line with the official narration of the past and which does not tell the alternative history cannot fulfil any aim other than being the 'political tool'<sup>277</sup> for the state which pursues legitimacy for its own political agenda. This points to the discussions about how memorialisation is complimentary to a real confrontation which, in cases of gross human rights violations, prosecution of the perpetrators is needed to ensure satisfaction from the victims' side. Speaking for UPM, it is clear that satisfaction does not come with mere memorialisation.

#### 6.4.4 Recognition

When asked about their perception of memorialisation of Ulucanlar in terms of its potential to provide recognition, ex-prisoners seemed confused about the concept. I asked whether they felt a sense of

<sup>275</sup> Yılmaz (n 207).

<sup>276</sup> Esentürk (n 202).

<sup>277</sup> Altınörs (n 184).

recognition, as a victim of Ulucanlar, with this memorialisation attempt. However, almost all of them objected to the term ‘victim’ saying that they do not consider themselves as such. I clarified it as ‘a person whose human rights are violated’, yet this did not change their reaction. Also, they interpreted the concept of recognition as ‘restoration of honour’ to which they strongly opposed as well.

As discussed earlier, the leftist discourse is central to the interviewees’ reactions, which makes their narrative very similar to each other. Almost all of them strongly rejected to being called a victim for several reasons. First, they think that they are ‘a part of a fight’<sup>278</sup> and what they went through in Ulucanlar is the natural result of it. They do not see this as victimisation by the state but rather as the outcome of their political struggle which they are proud of. The fact that they were tortured or deprived of their liberty does not change the tone of their reaction as for them, the term ‘victim’ has negative associations, such as weakness or being disadvantaged.

Another reason for their rejection of being called victim is the status they believe they have as ‘political prisoners’ in the public eye. They think that it is a ‘privileged status’<sup>279</sup> and they are highly respected in the society. For this very reason, they do not need any recognition neither from the state nor from the society. Because they are aware of the fact that they are ‘coded as terrorist’<sup>280</sup> in the state mentality. Altınörs says, ‘The state cannot restore our honour; neither can it ruin it. And we don’t have such a demand. We were political prisoners. We were already respected in the public eye. And we still are. So, we don’t want any recognition’.<sup>281</sup>

Esentürk thinks that it is not the state which they expect a recognition from. He tells how people in his environment, who regarded him as ‘terrorist’ in the past, changed their idea and apologised to him afterwards: ‘The society gives the recognition I deserve and this means a lot to me’.<sup>282</sup>

The state, which they see as the opponent and enemy in their fight, is thus not entitled to give any recognition to the survivors. Instead, they

<sup>278</sup> Canlı (n 216).

<sup>279</sup> Altınörs (n 184).

<sup>280</sup> Canlı (n 216).

<sup>281</sup> Altınörs (n 184).

<sup>282</sup> Esentürk (n 202).

say, they enjoy their respected status in the society. However, Türksoy expressed that although he rejects being seen as a victim he does expect an apology: ‘I know it is impossible to retrieve the sufferings, but we, at least, expect a truth commission and apology that we are not terrorists’,<sup>283</sup>

It can be seen that there is not a clear concept of recognition for the ex-prisoners and they do not demand or expect anything of this kind.

## 6.5 REACTIONS OF THE VISITORS TO THE MUSEUM

### 6.5.1 *The motivation for visiting*

The words which were used mostly by the visitors to describe the motivation for their visit are ‘curiosity’ and ‘atmosphere’. Almost all of them stated that they visited the museum as they wonder how life was behind the bars and that they wanted to see and feel in person what torments the prisoners went through in the very place where all those happened. Curiosity and desire to witness are key to the visitor motivation.

Secluded and disconnected sites, prisons are places which ordinary people have no idea about. Although located in the very centre of Ankara, Ulucanlar was still a disconnected place as a prison, yet it came to be known as the place of torture and sufferings in the collective memory of Turkish people: where numerous politicians and politically involved people ended up and the most contested executions took place. It is clear that a place of such disconnection coming into the public display is the main reason of the growing attraction of the visitors who wanted to explore the mystery of the prison which once existed just in their imagination. What marks the curiosity of the visitors is the traumatic and sorrowful past Ulucanlar has. Ahmet (27) says: ‘I wonder what life was like in there, what torments they went through (...) Yes, especially, their sufferings’. Fatih (24): ‘I was wondering about it for a long time (...) Injustices and executions. I came to see them’. The life behind the bars constitutes the main interest of those who do not have a first-hand experience of the museum.

<sup>283</sup> Türksoy (n 168).

However, it is the very environment/atmosphere of the prison, as an authentic traumatic site, where all those pains and sorrows are embedded and which is why it is the main reason of the interest. It is what almost all visitors underlined: ‘This place has a spiritual value to me. It is my fourth visit to it. I wanted to experience the atmosphere there: what they felt, what they went through. I put myself in their shoes: I wanted to feel how they exactly felt. I wanted to touch [it] (Polat, 45)’.

As a middle-aged person, Polat probably knows what happened as he witnessed important events in the recent history such as the military junta. Yet, he needs to ‘experience the atmosphere’ and ‘touch’ it in order to render what he has in his semantic memory palpable. Before seeing the museum, Ulucanlar was just a prison out there, part of an abstract information without being linked to any feeling or insight about what happened there. However, museum visit has transformed this abstract information into a real experience with the feeling and empathy it triggered in him. The antaenic magic lured him to the museum where he experienced the aura and the spirituality of the space and thus developed a real understanding of the intensity of its painful past.

Çağla (25) says: ‘I thought, if I go and see Ulucanlar in place, I could feel at least a bit what they went through’. Buse (16) states: ‘I was very curious about what happened inside. I am visiting Ulucanlar as it was a real prison before it was a museum’. Sultan (21): ‘I thought if I see the prison, I would be able to understand those people’.

The spatial aura of the place is seen as the primary factor to ‘feel’, ‘understand’ and to empathise with those who lived there. The visitors are aware, at least intuitively, that the aura is going to activate their cognitive and emotional abilities to develop a better understanding of the conditions there.

Interestingly, for some, the visit transcends a mere desire to see, experience or feel the sorrow but it is rather a wish to witness the atrocities in person. Eylül (15) says: ‘I came here to see what happened with my own eyes’. Ahmet (30): ‘I wanted to see what exactly happened thoroughly before and after 1980’. The authenticity of the prison provides the visitors with an unmediated memory of the past through which the museum becomes a source of truth and the visitors turn into witnesses. Hakan (38) tells how ‘I wanted to see what I already knew from the movies in the very place and it was very impressive. I wanted to remember the real events of the recent Turkish political history and to witness it in the very place’.

It is not a coincidence that Hakan uses the word ‘real’ to describe the historical facts represented in the museum. For him, the museum is the source of the real historical truth and so it is trustworthy. In this sense, the museum has the authority over the visitors and it turns them into witnesses with the stories it tells.

However, this is not the whole story of the authority Ulucanlar has as an authentic site. From their elaboration on their motivation to visit the museum, it can be deduced that Ulucanlar serves as a pilgrimage site for some. Polat (45) says: ‘This place has a spiritual side’. Eylül (15) affirms: ‘I am visiting to commemorate 6th May. I came for Deniz Gezmiş’. Similarly, many visitors mentioned Deniz Gezmiş while they were explaining the reason of their visit. Although, Ulucanlar hosts many commemoration ceremonies by leftist or rightist associations on the days of the executions of the prisoners, random visits to commemorate those persons show that the place is regarded as sacred by some who go and pay tribute to their comrades. The fact that some people visit Ulucanlar more than once reminds Assmann’s antagonism: ‘pilgrim’s seeking personal connection to an event in the past’.<sup>284</sup>

### 6.5.2 *What visitors learnt about the past*

The visitors were asked if the museum was informative about the past or not and if it taught them anything new. One third of them said it was, one third of them said it was not and the rest did not give a specific answer.

Those who think that the museum was informative could not specify what exactly they learnt about the past. Instead they came up with generic answers which yet have some meaningful patterns for the context of this study. One theme most of the visitors agreed upon is injustice. Almost all of the visitors stated that the prisoners did not commit any crime but were imprisoned just because of their thoughts so they are totally innocent. Buse (15) says: ‘I learnt that the prisoners were innocent and suffered. They were here for nothing’. Tolga (24) is more direct: ‘There is injustice in here’.

The visitors are aware that the prisoners were charged for their

<sup>284</sup> Susanne C Knittel, *The Historical Uncanny: Disability, Ethnicity, and the Politics of Holocaust Memory* (Fordham UP 2015) 49.

political opinions which they think is the reason of the injustice. Freedom of thought is what visitors mentioned while explaining why they think the prisoners were innocent. Celal (22) says: 'I found out that people were punished just because they shared their opinions. But they should not have been'. Ayşenur (20): 'There is no freedom of thought. People cannot say anything openly'.

Other themes which are thought to be the product of injustice are the executions and torture. Similarly, the visitors are convinced that they are unfair. Kamile (23): 'Here I found out that there is injustice and that the executions hit those who did not deserve it at all'. Sultan (21) says: 'People might be executed even though they were innocent' and she adds: 'I saw that severe punishments were implemented'. It can be observed that the traumatising memory of the executions and torture, as extreme forms of punishment, haunt the perception of the visitors as the source of injustice. They think it is too much for just expressing opinions. Halime (19) says: 'Those people were exposed to torture of many kinds which should be regarded as crimes against humanity'.

Although some visitors said that they find the museum illuminating and instructive, when it came to interpreting the recent political history represented in the museum, they did not say much other than the fact that it was a conflict between left and right because of which everybody suffered equally. Their elaboration on the recent past is marked with overgeneralisation and shallow interpretations which reduces the complexity of the political history into a right-left conflict. Fatih (24):

Back then they got brothers to kill each other. Right and left conflicts took place. Things that should not have happened. We are all Turks and this is what we should protect. Probably, those left and rightists were trying to do so. But there were misunderstandings. Some supported democracy while others said nationalism. That's why there were disagreements. This is nonsense I think.

The narratives with a right versus left theme in the interviews resonate the same reasoning: according to the visitors, there were different political groups and tendencies which fought for the same goal yet with different means. The salvation of the country was the common goal which they tried to achieve yet with different methods which is the source of the conflict among themselves. However, they were punished by the state equally which is not fair. Ata (25):

There [were] many people from various political views inside. Rightists, leftist or conservatives (...) And the visitor profile is the same as well. They all share a common goal which is the progress and salvation of the country. All of them wanted that. One said, for example, the solution of Kurdish question is Islam yet he was imprisoned.

Although technically there is truth in it, this interpretation overlooks the broader framework of political violence and it falls short in addressing the state's biased attitude towards marginal groups, Kurdish question or the impunity culture. This is very much in line with the museum's narrative which seems to provide a simplistic overview of the past. Ekrem (27), who admits that he did not read anything on the recent past, is expressing similar ideas: 'The museum taught me that painful things happened in the past. Bad things'.

Those who found the museum educative and informative stated that they learnt a lot from the newspapers on the wall, the biographies of the prisoners on the bunk beds and the other visual designs around the museum. The famous writers, politicians and journalists who were imprisoned in Ulucanlar were part of brand-new information that museum provides, especially for younger visitors. Yusuf (21): 'I found out that there were people who I did not know were staying here'.

However, there are other visitors who are critical of the educational side of the museum. For them, the museum does not have a complete historical narrative. Polat (45): 'Information regarding the recent past seemed incomplete to me. I think some things might have been covered up. No detailed information is given'. Ahmet (27) agrees: 'There are missing parts. It does not teach thoroughly. More explanations should be provided'.

Some visitors claim that the museum can be informative only if one has a background information. Feyza (20) states 'There are some names but we don't know what exactly happened. Seemed incomplete to me. If you happen to have an idea about the coups, you can grasp the past. I think these should have been highlighted more. More explanation should have been provided'.

Hakan (38) has similar opinions:

If you already have general information about the coups, you can add a bit to it here. It might make some sense for our generation but [for the younger generation] only if you know. Indeed, it does not make sense even for us as we did not experience these but just heard them from the elderly. For a high school kid, these might be mere pictures from the past.

According to this idea, the history represented in the museum is thought to be complementary to already existing knowledge of the visitors so it is not coherent or complete enough. Nevertheless, Çağla (25) states that she already had ideas before visiting the museum but still, she did not learn anything new: 'The museum made me feel rather than learn. It does provide brief information but those are already familiar facts. It rather addressed my emotions'. Ebru (20) has similar impressions: 'I would rather say it made me think rather than learn'. The mentioned visitors are aware that the museum is not providing anything new but it is appealing to the feelings.

An interesting pattern comes up at this very point. Some visitors think that the museum is not informative about the past as it reflects today rather than the past. Ebru (20): 'It made me think that it is not different from the current situation. There are big differences in terms of punishments but the state is still [did not finish the sentence] (...) We are still experiencing the same things'. Ata is of the same opinion:

In fact, it sheds light on the present rather than the past. If we take things out, it's exactly the same as today. All of the inmates were sent to jail for their ideas. Today, similarly, people might be put in jail for their ideas. The museum does not teach anything about the past but reflects the present.

The visitors, who are invited to reflect on the past and the present by the museum, come up with a reasoning that the circumstances are not different from those of the past. Nevertheless, confronting the negative past is the *raison d'être* of memorial museums which is supposedly done in a post-conflict context. In cases where the past is not yet past, the narrative of the museum does not tell the story of the past, yet mirrors the very present, creating horror. What Halime (19) says confirms this idea: 'I am here to see where they can bring us if we fall into such a situation'.

In the light of the responses given by the visitors, the educative/informative function of the museum is suspicious. It represents the recent political history as an unfortunate era which was plagued with conflicts reducing the clashes to disagreement between the right and the left wings and portraying the victims as natural casualties of it. The visitors do not seem to have an idea about the important historical events Ulucanlar witnessed as a prison, such as Ulucanlar massacre, as it is not highlighted and the way it was represented is highly biased. The main perpetrator, the state and its responsibility and role in the atrocities, is overshadowed



by this right versus left antagonism. The state was depicted as an angry parent who overpunished his/her kids for their fight over the politics. Halime (19) says: 'I saw that those who could not share out the country, had to share a ward of a few square metres'.

However, the museum does contribute to a number of functions which are in line with the missions it is supposed to have as a memorial museum. It can be seen that it triggered critical thinking as a result of which visitors came up with important lessons and deductions. Visitors either questioned the value of the human dignity or compared the past with present. Ülkü (16) says: 'The place I have been to has given me [an insight about] humanity. Seeing people not being treated as human made me question human values'. Ebru (20) says: 'It made me realise that the conditions are not that different from today'.

Moreover, it is obvious that the museum does bring a recognition for the violations of rights of the victims. The visitors are aware that being a political prisoner means being charged for opinions which they opposed openly during the interviews. Most of them stated that it is a pity that those people were punished for what they thought. Freedom of thought is what most of the visitors mentioned while talking about the injustices they think happened in Ulucanlar. Executions, ill-treatment and torture were also mentioned as being unfair and extreme. So, in this sense, it can be claimed that the museum contributes to promotion of rights such as human dignity, freedom of thought, right to life, prohibition of torture and right to freedom. Besides, it is extremely important that the victims were recognised as subject of the rights by the visitors. Although this is overshadowed by the problematic representations of the victims, such as by limiting it to famous people or by biased approach to the political orientations, victims are still regarded as human beings whose dignity was violated or destroyed by the state.

### *6.5.3 Emotional outcome*

As discussed earlier, memorial museums emerged as a novel genre different from the traditional museology in that they address feelings to create empathy and understanding for the victims of an atrocity. One of the core values underlying the existence of memorial museums, feelings, is a critical element as it is a means to invite visitors to reflect on the past, the present and the future, to identify with the victims and to have an awareness of human rights and democratic values. To create feelings,

memorial museums apply performative, experiential and theatrical strategies of various kinds which is called 'prosthetic memory'.<sup>285</sup> Combined with the power of the magical aura which comes with the authenticity of the place, prosthetic memory increases the degree of the effect the museum has on the visitors leading to a better comprehension of the message the museum conveys.

Ulucanlar is an example of such a combination. In order to talk about the feelings Ulucanlar evoked in the visitors, the prosthetic memory it applied to create the atmosphere should be mentioned first. The prosthetic elements are embedded in the authentic parts of the museum. For example, melancholic songs by very controversial singers are playing in the very entrance of the museum. However, this is not the only sound effect applied there. From the loudspeakers, one hears the screams and cries of the prisoners who are being beaten up by the guard, whom they beg to stop. Those sound effects are accompanied by melancholic songs which can be heard along the corridor where the solitary cells were located. This is what struck almost all of the visitors. Eylül (15): 'I felt terrible when I heard the sounds of torture'. Mehtap (58): 'I was most impressed with the sounds I heard in the dungeons'.

Besides the sound effects, the solitary cells and the dungeons as well as the wards are decorated with the wax mannequins and mice (Figures 16-18). The wax mannequins within the cells look quite depressed in various dramatic shapes: they are thinking with their face covered with their hands or leaning on the wall, chained with shackles. The expression on their face is painful which invites the visitors to feel so. Feyza (20): 'You enter from a narrow place at first. It is horrible. Then the feeling of fright becomes a feeling of pity. Especially with the songs (...) Seeing the models, one starts to feel really sad and pity'.

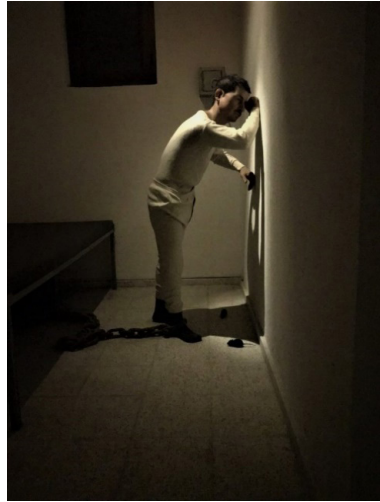
<sup>285</sup> Alison Landsberg, 'Prosthetic Memory: The Ethics and Politics of Memory in an Age of Mass Culture' [2018] *Memory and Popular Film* 147.



*Figure 16 wax mannequin holding his face with despair*



*Figure 17 wax mannequin in disciplinary cell*



*Figure 18 wax mannequin shackled*

From the visitors' responses, it is clear that with the strategies applied in the material organisation, the museum more or less achieves the aim of reflecting the torture, ill-treatment and poor conditions in Ulucanlar which all of the visitors agree to be incompatible with human dignity. Ahmet (30):

We have had twinge[s] of conscience with what we have seen here because we saw the difficult conditions in which a person cannot live humanely. We saw torture (...) There are only [a] few toilets in the wards of 80-90-100 people, even the bathroom is not properly functioning. We've seen how hard a person really can survive.

Surrounded by the realistic representation of the conditions of the prison, the visitors who are invited to experience real feelings seemed overwhelmed and some of them said that they could not express how they felt. Their feelings were so complex and intense that they could not describe it. Hakan (38): 'Very bitter. Very surprising. It's not exactly the one that can be expressed in a word. Feels like the mixture of all. Impressive. I couldn't fit it into words'.

However, there were some others who were able to describe their feelings. The patterns of feelings which came up in those accounts are horror, pity and melancholy, which is not surprising as, as a place of trauma, Ulucanlar breathes the pain of the past which permeated on its walls. Ahmet (27) said 'It's a fact that there's something different about [the environment]. It is cold and it scares you. Obviously they suffered. You can feel that atmosphere. When you go in, you can feel it on the walls and in the wards'.

Another feeling which came up as a pattern in the visitor interviews is pity. The visitors seemed shattered on what they witnessed inside. Buse (16) said 'The sounds one hears while entering the wards or the cells were not real, but the effects were very lively. It affects you very much and makes you sad. It is a pity that those really happened. It makes one both shocked and very sad'.

Melancholy, hopelessness and dreariness mark the visitor responses in general. Some people cannot hide that they feel overwhelmed at the end of the tour. Celal (22) said 'One feels depressed. There's a lot of labour inside. Very impressive. One's heart is shrinking. You empathise with those who stay there, and grow zero hope. You know their lives are ruined, whether they are executed or not. One's heart is shrinking'.

However, the visitors are aware of the fact that it is the atmosphere which evoked bitter feelings in them. They know that the very place has a lot to do with the way they felt as it is an authentic trauma site with the prosthetic memory embedded in it. Polat (45) said ‘They all [the prisoners] have a story. There is an energy. I felt that. There is sadness, there is regret and there is a story. It is difficult to express this with words. (...) To be able to think like them, we need to feel what they went through in that atmosphere’.

Landsberg argues that prosthetic memory aims at generating feelings of a past event in those who did not live through it and yet this is done for a reason. It is this realm of the feelings which empathy is born into bringing along understanding, realisation and questioning. Landsberg contends that ‘empathy is not purely emotional but it has crucial cognitive components’.<sup>286</sup> Putting oneself in the shoes of the others brings not only an emotional connection but also an intellectual one which she calls ‘intellectual coming to terms with the other’s circumstances’.<sup>287</sup>

The visitor responses are very much in line with Landsberg’s formulation. The melancholy and the negative feelings they had during the tour resonated in the way they reacted to the conditions, which have meaningful patterns in the context of the present study. The empathy they developed resulted in either identification with the victims or questioning their own life and feeling guilty.

Yali (20) is Syrian. She tells how hard it is to feel what the victims felt: ‘I’ve had a lot of emotional confusion. It was very difficult to understand how people lived, so I put myself in their shoes. It’s hard to feel what they feel. But I’ve had it’.

Some visitors identified with the victims and tried to understand how it feels like being criminal. Polat (45) says: ‘I’ve never been sentenced to any punishment but I tried to imagine as if I were’. Ülkü (16): ‘I went in normally, but I went out like a criminal. I could feel that psychological drama in me’. Şeyma (16) similarly tells: ‘Especially when you leave the museum, you feel as if you were a criminal who finally had their freedom. This is very intense. Creepy emotions put pressure on people’.

Empathy invited many other visitors to reflect on the conditions the victims lived within and to compare it with their own life. Yusuf (21)

<sup>286</sup> Landsberg (n 284) 147.

<sup>287</sup> *ibid.*

is one of them: 'I'm sorry to see that. I questioned my own life: Those people lived through that we are lost in what we are doing! Are things that we are dealing with really worth dealing with?' Sultan (21) has similar feelings: 'It's very sad to see people spent years in tiny rooms while we get bored even where we are standing'.

According to Landsberg, prosthetic memory is important in that it might function as a powerful tool to shape visitors' subjectivity. On the basis of empathy and insight, a 'sensuous' engagement with the traumatic past has a potential to transform into a political engagement. Landsberg asserts that 'the political potential of prosthetic memory lies in its capacity to enable ethical thinking'.<sup>288</sup> Upon witnessing the unfair victimisation of the prisoners in Ulucanlar, the visitors built ethical relationships with each other by putting themselves in the prisoners' shoes and came to a realisation that the atrocities are 'inhumane' and 'gruesome' which should be identified as 'crimes against humanity'. It is not coincidence that visitors adopt a human rights discourse while articulating on their impressions inside. They refer to execution as an extreme form of punishment; and torture and ill-treatment as incompatible with human dignity. It can be said that remembering a negative past with deep feelings empowered them with a moral/political stand which they expressed openly while criticising the state violence. Remembering becomes a resistance to violence.

#### *6.5.4 The message conveyed from the museum*

It can be claimed that the message the visitors got from the museum can shed light on its functionality in terms of its potential to enable the social transformation it promises to achieve as a memorial museum. What message visitors get from the museum has a lot to do with overall representation, politics and strategies applied as a whole to trigger emotional and cognitive abilities of persons. Therefore, this very question addresses important points the museum fulfilled or failed to achieve what it is supposed to do as a memorial museum.

One fourth of the total visitors (8 out of 32) are intimidated by the message they think the museum gives. They interpreted the museum's message as a threat or warning. Their responses echoed their fright over

<sup>288</sup> Landsberg (n 284) 156.

the costs of being politically involved. Ayşenur (20) thinks that the state warns those who wants to be politicised: 'It is like the museum warns us by saying: "We are such a state, watch out your steps!" Think what you think inside, but don't give it out. This is what I understood from the museum'. Şule (20) is of the same opinion: 'I got it as "Don't dare to get involved in political events!"'. Feyza (20) explains how she interprets the message: 'I would never want to go into such an environment. I don't know how different a prison is now, but staying in a closed place must be very different and I think we should stay a little further away from something like this'.

As discussed earlier, a healthy confrontation with a negative past is possible only if the circumstances that lead to human rights abuses are over within the given society. An official recognition of the past wrongdoings can be meaningful only if they are not part of state practice any more. In Turkey, this is not the case in the last ten years. Although Ulucanlar is a product of a relatively democratic and libertarian phase in the recent past, things subsequently turned upside down, making the decade we are living through an extremely oppressive one with an unprecedented level of state violence towards its citizens. Very similarly to the past events and conditions UPM exhibits, many writers, journalists, politicians as well as thousands of ordinary people are imprisoned because of their alleged ties with 'terror' organisations. Those who are in prison are living in terrible conditions: being tortured, deprived of the right to see their relatives and even their lawyers. In the aftermath of the failed coup attempt of 15 July, the government crackdown hit people from various distinct dissident groups, such as leftists, Kurdish or Alevi people. The government took the advantage of the coup to suppress any marginal group it considers as a threat, getting more and more oppressive. The current political agenda is still marked with a right versus left antagonism in which leftists are targeted by the state. Any protest or march is silenced with police violence. People are purged from their jobs without being prosecuted. Besides, the armed conflict between PKK and the Turkish forces is still going on, adding more to the casualties.

It is obvious that the circumstances Ulucanlar used to have as a prison are not different from those of present – except for the capital punishment. In that case, visitors, who are invited to reflect on the past and present by the abuses they witness within the museum, inevitably come to the conclusion that the past is not yet past. The atrocities the

museum displays become an exhibition of state violence which might hit them any time if they get politically involved. This, by all means, is intimidating and threatening.

The second common pattern in visitor responses is the importance of human rights and values. One fourth of the respondents stated that the message the museum conveys is the importance of the human values and rights. Freedom of thought is the one right most of them mentioned. Apart from that, the visitors hinted that torture and execution are by no means compatible with human dignity so they are unacceptable. Those who think that what matters is human rights defended their opinions with the value of human life and dignity. These two concepts are key to their elaboration on torture, executions and physical conditions of the prison. For Ahmet (27) the message is: 'It's very important to be human. It's very important to treat human like human. People may commit a crime, may have to pay the penalty, but I think it should not be in these conditions and environment'. Ülkü (16) thinks that torture reminds us the value of the human life: 'It reminds people of human values. The newspapers on the wall reads "76 dead in prison", "they were beaten up to death". When one sees the ambience and the things in the museum, s/he gets aware. Those are put here to increase our empathy. And it really works'.

It can be argued that the crystallisation of the trauma within the official narrative provides a legitimate ground for discussions of human rights and criticism of state violence. Although some of the visitors are intimidated, others are still encouraged to talk about human rights and criticise their violations even though this might put them in trouble for criticising the government. The source of this encouragement is the official framework within which the museum exhibits the abuses. It is a museum which is endorsed by the state itself no matter how much it mirrors the violence it adopts recently.

Five of the visitors interpreted the message of the museum as the repairing of the reputation of the victims who were totally innocent and killed or tortured for nothing. They think what they lived through was unjust. Ayşe (54) says: '[the museum tells that] people were killed for nothing. There is actually nothing they did wrong'. This points to the function of the museum as the provider of public recognition and acknowledgment for the victimisation of people. In addition to the official recognition, the museum enables a broader social recognition for those who were victimised by the state, which can be regarded as a



restoration of their dignity. A broader social framework for recognition is vitally important in that by clarifying what exactly happened and who were victimised, the museum, in a way, exonerates those who once were charged as criminals. However, the museum falls short in labelling responsibility and/or accountability or highlighting the state violence thoroughly.

Five people thought that there are lessons to be taken from the museum. Ekrem (27) says: ‘The message is that things like this should not happen again. The museum exists for this very reason. To avoid such things’. Ata (25): ‘I think the museum says: “Look at the history and don’t make the same mistakes again!”. I think this is basically it’. However, Fatih (24) and Halime (19) think that the lesson to be taken from the history is ‘unity and togetherness’ which people should embrace regardless of their political orientation. For them, the source of the conflicts is the right versus left clash as a result of which the victimisations took place. This approach overlooks the role of the state as an active agent in creating conflict as well as accountability and responsibility. It very much resonates with the politics of representation in the museum which portrays the state as a furious parent who had to punish its kids.

And finally, three visitors stated that the message the museum conveys is the duty to remember those who were victimised for their thoughts and struggle. Remembering the legacy of their memory becomes a moral obligation for us to keep their ideas alive. Sultan (21) says that ‘Some people might give up their lives (...) That’s why, they should not be forgotten. It is very good that this place is turned into a museum and we remember thanks to it. I think the museum is important not to forget those’.

Çağla (25) claims that remembering is important because otherwise the sufferings of those people would be meaningless: ‘Those people died for a thing (...) For their struggle. We should not forget them because their efforts should not be wasted’.

The morality resonated in these responses is the one which renders remembering as a meaningful duty for those who dedicated their lives for a political struggle. The struggle they were engaged in, was a solemn endeavour which aimed at salvation of the country. The self-sacrifice the victims ventured, as a result of which their lives were wasted, is a reason good enough to immortalise them. They, by all means, should be remembered for the sake of their struggle.

## 7.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the ex-prisoners' account, the contested transformation process and the semiological reading of the museum, it is clear that there is a deep politics in UPM applied in representational and structural level. The representation of the prisoners and the main historical events within the museum show the selective and exclusionary strategies which are based on omissions of not only important historical traumas such as the Ulucanlar massacre but also prominent leftist figures from the museum's narrative. Besides, by attaching conservative figures of symbolic significance to the museum's narrative, it can be seen that a policy of balance has been adopted to equalise the conservative and leftist ideologies. In this sense, the museum has turned into a battleground on which a symbolic war is being fought. The structural changes are also related to the politics of the museum. By erasing the signs of traumas, painting the walls, turning the museum into a sterile place not only the severity of the sufferings is mitigated but they were also covered up. With substantial structural changes, such as demolition of the women's wards or addition of a ward with a conservative theme, the prison's original memory has been decontextualised by which the intimacy of memory and place is distorted. The memory of Ulucanlar has been rewritten with the political concerns of those who have the power to control it, reproducing the official discourse.

The data collected from the interviews with the ex-prisoners is very much in line with the abovementioned findings. The ex-prisoners think that the legacy of the memory of Ulucanlar has been distorted with the politics to such an extent that it does not reflect their Ulucanlar at all. They expressed their dissatisfaction especially with the representation strategies which not only have left them out as 'ordinary' prisoners but also portrayed their leftist identity in a way to mitigate and trivialise

their sufferings and victimisation. They are not happy at all with being depicted as melancholic, desperate criminals serving their terms in regret and pain. Therefore, the museum, whose authenticity is distorted with the illusion of fictional a distant past, which is less dangerous to exhibit, does not tell their memory but plays with it, which for many of my informants constitutes an assault not only to their personal stories but also to the history.

The main emotional outcome of this is the feeling of disconnectedness evoked in the ex-prisoners which is accompanied by anger. It is obvious that they are outraged by the assault on their memory because of the fact that the intimacy between their memory and the space was destroyed, out of which some of the ex-prisoners had felt nostalgic and triumphant during their visit to the prison before its transformation into a museum. With the disappointment from this spatial distortion they felt like their right to memory is violated.

No doubt, a place of such manipulation cannot serve as a memorial museum according to the ex-prisoners. They are aware of the fact that the Turkish government cannot afford a real confrontation as Ulucanlar is not the only one buried in its bloody history. A product of a false-confrontation discourse created to meet compatibility criterion for the EU membership, the museum is opened to cover up the state violence rather than confront it, thus bringing neither healing nor reparation from the victims' side. The ex-prisoners think that the museum is not functional as a memorial museum in fulfilling any of the missions it normally should do, such as transmitting memory of the past and conveying the message **Never again**. In this sense, it is a completely empty gesture having little significance in terms of justice as it stands as a monument of impunity for them.

For that very reason, the museum does not provide any recognition for the victims in any way as they think they are already coded as terrorists in the state's mentality. What the museum does is actually reproduction of the terrorist narration within the official discourse by the representation strategies applied. The selection of the newspaper coverage of the Ulucanlar massacre is one example in which the leftist prisoners are mentioned as violent 'militants'. Besides, the name of those who were killed during the massacre are not mentioned in the list of the executed. Moreover, the leftist identity, which is central to the informants' narration, is marginalised further within the museum, deepening the political division.

It is clear from the visitor reactions that the museum is an attraction point which derives its power both from being a place of trauma and from the authenticity it has as an original prison. Many visitors are attracted by their curiosity over the place which is marked with death, torture and atrocity which, they think, they can 'feel' and 'understand' better only by going there. It is this sacred aura, the antaenic magic, with which the museum lures many people to follow the traces of the past and to experience the very atmosphere which breathes the pain. The visitors' motivation for visiting the museum is marked not only with a plain desire to experience the horror of the place but also with a wish to seek a personal connection with those whom the visitors identify with as their comrades. In that sense, the museum serves as a pilgrimage site for commemoration and paying tribute to the victims and showing their respect to their solemn memory, which is in an unmediated form with the immediate presence of the artefacts such as the gallows and personal belongings of the victims.

Considering the visitors' motivation to visit the place with what ex-prisoners said about the distortion of the authenticity, it can be clearly seen that the museum's authenticity claim is still valid among the visitors, which is the most important factor for its attraction.

It has been seen that the educational aspect of the museum does shed light on some points which are meaningful for the context of the present study. The museum's narrative seems to give a simplistic account of the past which reduces the conflicts to a mere right versus left antagonism and overshadows the state violence and responsibility which resonated in the generic responses of the visitors. Even so, some visitors were critical of the museum's narrative claiming that it is incomplete and incoherent and some others asserted that it reflects the present day rather than the past. The fact that not a single visitor mentioned the Ulucanlar massacre confirms this very idea.

However, it is clear that the museum provided a sense of awareness for almost all of the visitors more or less. One fact which almost all of the respondents agreed upon is that the prisoners were not criminals and what they went through was totally unfair. They think that those people were imprisoned just because of their thoughts yet no human deserves the way they were punished. It is interesting that the reactions of the visitors are marked with a human rights discourse in which they mention freedom of thought, the value of human right and human dignity. Clearly, the museum does promote human rights and

values with which it also provides a recognition of the victims as the subject of the rights. It can be claimed that the museum goes beyond the informative role of the traditional museology and turns the visitors into witnesses which comes with a moral obligation to acknowledge the sufferings and victimisation of the prisoners.

In addition, it is obvious that the museum triggered critical thinking as a result of which some visitors came up with the realisation that the museum is missing some important elements which is probably 'intentional' and that the present circumstances are not different from the past. The visitors who are invited to reflect on the past and present are empowered with the critical stance they get against the state which is applying similar violence to its citizens.

However, from the ex-prisoners' perspective, the museum is not informative enough to give a coherent account of the past nor does it reflect the real habitat the prisoners had established for themselves. Rather than clarifying what happened and why, the museum tells the story of an unfortunate past which is plagued with a brother fight, hinting the important events only subtly. And the daily life reflected in the museum has nothing to do with the politic-academic school the prisoners had established within the prison which was very productive.

The performative theatrical strategies adopted by the museum with the sound effects, melancholic songs and wax mannequins – prosthetic memory – by which the feelings of the visitors are addressed seem to evoke very intense negative emotions in the visitors. The realm of these negative feelings into which empathy is born is assumed to bring understanding, realisation and questioning, as empathy is not only purely emotional but it has also cognitive elements. It has been seen that the emotional-cognitive aspect of the prosthetic memory resonates in some of the visitors' accounts conforming this. Horror, pity and melancholy accompanied by hopelessness enabled the visitors to identify with the victims. By contemplating on the circumstances and the sufferings the victims went through, the visitors seemed to gain an insight in human rights and the value of the human dignity. It has been observed that an emotional engagement with the traumatic past has led to an ethical thinking and prosthetic memory has shaped some of the visitors' subjectivity by giving them a moral stance against violence and ill-treatment. On the basis of empathy not only an emotional but also an ethical relationship has been built between the victims and the visitors.

Nevertheless, it has been seen that the ex-prisoners are not happy with the desperate image they were depicted with. They reject being depicted as such and do not prefer being identified with pity. They regard it as offensive and incompatible with their dignity.

The message the visitors think the museum conveys, in our opinion, is crucial in that it sheds light on the performance of the museum as a memory space. It has been seen that the museum's message is interpreted by one third of the visitors as a 'threat' or 'warning' by the state which is oppressing its citizens the way it used to do in the past. Being surrounded with the similar atrocities which are reflected in the museum, the visitors cannot help feeling intimidated by the museum's narrative and thinking that the past is not yet past. It is clear from their accounts that they are discouraged from being politically involved and expressing their opinions openly. This is in line with what the ex-prisoners think the museum conveys as the ultimate message. Some of them underlined that the museum implies that being politically involved might result in being punished and intimidates especially younger generation in this sense. On the other hand, the museum seems to encourage some others to criticise the government and talk about the human rights at the expense of being in trouble. They dared to speak up and express their stance against the violence, which, considering the spiral of the silence created recently, might get them into trouble. Besides, an awareness on human rights provides a recognition of the sufferings of the victims although they are rendered invisible as ordinary people in the museum's narration. It is obvious that the visitors are convinced that the victims are innocent which means that their dignity is restored in a broader societal framework.

In the final analysis, it has been seen that Ulucanlar has been instrumentalised as an ideological tool to serve the political needs of the government as a part of a confrontation discourse adopted in the 2000s as it was required for compatibility for EU membership, for legitimacy and consolidation of the authority, which the brand-new political party AKP needed at that time. Established in an era which marks a shift from Kemalism to conservatism, the museum is also an extension of the attempt of conservative ideology to establish ideological ties with the past which it lacked so far because of the hegemony of Kemalist ideology ruling the country since its establishment.

The proto-transition from militocracy to civiocracy during the 2000s, in which important steps were taken in the legislative and juridical level to

come to terms with the past, proved to be superficial and ineffective as it lacked a broader confrontation accompanied by criminal prosecutions. A product of this false-confrontation era, memorialisation of Ulucanlar, has been a tool with which the official acknowledgement is diluted and the severity of atrocities are covered up to ensure impunity for ongoing criminal prosecutions rather than serving as a symbolic reparation for the victims. In this sense, it is not surprising that the museum provides no reconciliation or healing in the individual level for the victims as it was not complemented with a broader confrontation especially with justice and redress. On the contrary, it has been seen that it has incited rage and hatred against the government, leading to ex-prisoners' further radicalisation.

It is also clear that the museum's narrative is problematic in many ways. It is not coherent enough to provide an insight on the real reasons of the conflicts. Besides, the biased approach towards specific groups leads not only to their further marginalisation, deepening political divisions, but it also hinders a mutual understanding and solidarity between different groups. The fact that the museum mirrors the very state violence which is plaguing the present day worse than ever means that the message **Never again** is not conveyed but rather that the visitors are intimidated by what they witness in the museum. So, it is suspicious how a museum of such controversy could contribute to a social transformation.

On the other hand, having the power of authenticity as a trauma place, it has been seen that the museum does contribute on a number of factors which are constructive. It definitely provides a societal recognition for personal sufferings of the victims accompanied by 'refund of reputation' which is important for the restoration of the victims' dignity. Furthermore, it is clear that the museum promotes important human rights and emphasises human dignity as the basis of these rights. By turning the visitors into witnesses, the museum shapes their subjectivity by empowering them with awareness and critical stance against state violence.

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#### INTERVIEWS

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- Interview with Barbaros Yılmaz, Ex-prisoner (Ankara, Turkey, May 2019)
- Interview with Cemalettin Canlı, Ex-prisoner (Ankara, Turkey, May 2019)
- Interview with Hüseyin Esentürk, Ex-prisoner (Ankara, Turkey, May 2019)

REMEMBERING WITHOUT CONFRONTING

- Interview with İsmail Beşikçi, Ex-prisoner, via e-mail (May 2019)  
Interview with Kerem Okur, Ex-prisoner (Ankara, Turkey, May 2019)  
Interview with Murat Özçelik, Ex-prisoner, (Ankara, Turkey, May 2019)  
Interview with Nergiz Uzun, Ex-prisoner (Ankara, Turkey, May 2019)  
Interview with Tezcan Candan, TMMOB Ankara Chairperson (Ankara, Turkey, May 2019)  
Interview with Turgut Türksoy, Ex-prisoner (Ankara, Turkey, May 2019)  
Interview with Veli Saçılık, Ex-prisoner (Ankara, Turkey, May 2019)

## ANNEX

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WITH EX-PRISONERS

1. To what extent do you think the museum reflects your memories?
2. What kind of feelings has the museum created for you?
3. As a person who stayed there, what kind of purpose does this museum serve from your perspective? Do you feel any kind of recognition or not?
4. What could be the role of the museum of this kind in the society? Do you think it is a need or not?

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WITH MUSEUM VISITORS

1. What is your motivation for visiting the museum?
2. What have you learnt about the past?
3. Describe your feelings after visiting the museum.
4. What is the message the museum tries to convey?

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The present thesis - ***Remembering without Confronting. Memorialization as a Reparation without Coming to Terms with the Past: Case study: Ulucanlar Prison Museum*** by Emine Ay and supervised by Gabor Olah, Masaryk University, Brno - was submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the European Master's Programme in Human Rights and Democratisation (EMA), coordinated by EIUC.

