

MEMORY POLITICS IN 21ST-CENTURY TRAUMA  
SITE MUSEUMS IN TURKEY

A Ph.D. Dissertation

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MEMORY POLITICS IN 21ST-CENTURY TRAUMA SITE

MUSEUMS IN TURKEY

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# Memory Politics in 21st-Century Trauma Site Museums in Turkey

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By Berat Uygur Altınok

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Memory Politics in 21st-Century Trauma Site Museums in Turkey

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February 2023

This research focuses on the memory politics of the Justice and Development Party through the reading of trauma-site museums that focuses on the past's political violence. Based on the fieldwork conducted in four different trauma-site museums opened between 2010 and 2021, the research argues the specific formation of these memory spaces and the instrumentalization of trauma sites are a case of a populist memory regime. The fieldwork includes Ulucanlar Prison Museum (Ankara), Memory July 15 Museum (İstanbul), July 15 Democracy Museum (Ankara), and Kahramankazan Martyrs of July and Democracy Museum (Ankara). The four museums chosen for this research symbolize different phases of the JDP government's populist memory regime; the Ulucanlar Prison Museum display's narrative, which aims to construct a people vs. establishment axiom, while the post-July 15 museums' narratives aim to establish a people vs. traitors axiom. Overall the research focuses on the constituent role of collective trauma in populist identity politics and how trauma sites are instrumentalized in the mnemonic strategies to construct memory communities.

**Keywords:** Collective memory, Trauma site museums, Collective trauma, Populism, Mnemonic Strategies

## ÖZET

### 21. Yüzyıl Türkiye'si Travma Müzelerinde Hafıza Siyaseti

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Ph. D., Siyaset Bilimi ve Kamu Yönetimi Bölümü

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Bu tez, Türkiye'nin yakın geçmişine damgasını vurmuş siyasi şiddete odaklanan travma müzeleri üzerinden Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi'nin hafıza siyasetine odaklanmaktadır. 2010-2021 yılları arasında açılmış çeşitli travma müzelerini odağına alan saha araştırmasından yola çıkan bu tez, tartışılan hafıza mekanlarının özgün bir şekilde tertiplenmesini ve travma mekanlarının araçsallaştırılmasını bir popülist bellek rejimi örneği olarak ele almaktadır. Saha araştırmasına dahil edilen müzeler şu şekildedir: Ulucanlar Cezaevi Müzesi (Ankara), Hafıza 15 Temmuz Müzesi (İstanbul), 15 Temmuz Demokrasi Müzesi (Ankara) ve Kahramankazan 15 Temmuz Şehitleri ve Demokrasi Müzesi (Ankara). Bu dört müze, AKP hükümetinin popülist hafıza rejiminin farklı aşamalarını simgelemektedir; Ulucanlar Cezaevi Müzesi millet-müesses nizam ikiliği temelinde bir anlatı kurmayı amaçlarken, 15 Temmuz 2016 sonrasında inşa edilen müzeler ise millet-vatan haini ikiliğini tesis etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. En genel anlamda bu araştırma, kolektif travmanın popülist kimlik siyasetindeki kurucu rolüne ve travma mekanlarının ortak hafıza topluluklarının oluşturmak için nasıl araçsallaştırıldığına odaklanmaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** kolektif hafıza, travma müzeleri, kolektif travma, popülizm, hafıza stratejileri.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

This research focuses on introducing trauma site museums into the museum studies lexicon of 21<sup>st</sup>-century Turkey. Since its inception, the Republic has paid significant attention to the construction of museums, case in point with Ethnography Museum in Ankara, to utilize the exhibitionary complexes to establish the normative and political visions of the ideology of the early republic. National history museums are exemplary institutions for forming a national identity compatible with the former empire transformed into a secular polity. Although national history museums, monuments, and martyr cemeteries that memorialize the Independence War depict the thanatopolitics of war and mayhem, the identity they constitute bounds to national unity, meaning they often represent an us-vs.-the distinction, the target of the distinction lingers around the national, ethnic, or religious identities. 21<sup>st</sup>-century trauma site museums in Turkey, for the first time in their museology, turn attention to their wrong-doings through the depiction of past political violence. Under the AKP rule, memory politics targets its history to construct collective memory through past traumatic events. A divergence from national history museum modalities, the contemporary trauma site museums operate on

the populism – collective memory nexus to instrumentalize the said memory for the constitution of new political subjectivities.

## **1.1. Literature Review**

### **1.1.1. Populism**

Populism remains one of the most contested and exhausted concepts in the study of contemporary politics. Literature on populism occupies itself with providing some sense of conceptual stability to a concept that is both theoretically and empirically indeterminate. This indeterminacy is derivative of:

*The sheer number of cases of Populism:* Widespread use of the concept in identifying polities, political movements, and political actors in different historical and geographical settings. As a result, populism is exhausted in its capacity to provide a clear-cut analytical category through conceptual stretching that is derivative of differences between cases that are identified as populist. What is problematic is that independent works on specific historical and geographical issues focus too much on the specificities of national and regional politics, leaving the literature "not as cumulative as it should be, and it is prone to exception fallacy" (Kaltwasser, Taggart, Espejo & Ostiguy 2017).

*Different Approaches:* Populism is not only exhausted by the increment in the number of political instances identified as populist but also by the number of different approaches to how and in what ways one could identify a case in populist terms. Literature on populism provides several different definitions of what populism is. Conceptualization varies from reduction to mere rhetoric to conflating the concept to the point that it is almost synonymous with the political, as in the case of Ernesto Laclau (2005a; 2005b),

from identifying it as in terms of a thin-centered ideology (Mudde 2017; Stanley 2008) to political-strategic approach (Weyland 2017).

*Indeterminacy as Constitutive Element of Populism:* In the study of populism, indeterminacy has not only been derivative of many different approaches or historically varied experiences of populist instances but also stems from the theoretical and practical terrain where populism operates. Populism operates within the discursive frames, formed around the formation of a new political subjectivity in the name of people and is "quite simply, a way of constructing the political" (Laclau 2005a). In this regard, the object of populist politics (formation of a new political subjectivity) is constituted in the terrain of constantly shifting antagonistic relations and continuously re-constitutes itself through the practices of discursive framing. Therefore populism embraces the indeterminacy of the grounds that political subjectivity is constituted on and discursively embarks on the fluidity and openness of identities, formulating itself as a form of politics that authors new forms of identities in various forms. These forms are, however, quite specific to the historical relations that once formed the political subjectivities of the socio-political organization in which populism has been incepted.

*Then, how to define populism?*

Before attempting to give a sound conceptual ground for the definition of populism, reflection on the body of literature on populism and certain strands of academic endeavor mentioned above is necessary. This study will use a definition of populism that stems from discursive and ideational approaches. However, it will not a) theoretically position populism as a thin-centered ideology and b) conceptualize it in synonymy with

the definition of political (although heavily drawing the conceptual and theoretical formulations from Laclau's theorization of populism).

Populism is a political logic defined as "a rhetorical displacement whenever a literal term is substituted by a figural one" (Laclau 2005a, 71). This rhetorical displacement is the consequence of the logic of equivalence when a social demand starts to form a chain of equivalence with other unsatisfied demands and produces an empty signifier, which provides the continuity and mobility of the chain of demands. In this process, the empty signifier (often the people) operates not as a sum of various demands. Instead, it totalizes the chain, constituting itself as the sole carrier of unsatisfied demands. In Laclau's theory, a populist instance must satisfy two criteria: Reference to people and antagonistic relations that formulates the discursive logic of equivalence.

In this regard, populism will be understood as a form of politics that invokes the central paradoxes of modern political organization of nation-states, representative democracy, and constitutionalism by pointing out the gap between the practical experience of popular sovereignty and the legitimacy derivative of such institutions. Legitimacy in this regard is scrutinized since the sole authority of modern politics rests on the sovereignty of the people, yet that very sovereignty's praxis has been left under-performed.

Populist politics rests on real people's ideological and practical constitution, the legitimate authority in its counter-hegemonic ideological struggle against the establishment and the elite, and the foundations of its mass voter base and its mobilization (Muller\*). Antagonistic relations manifest themselves through constructing an internal frontier, dividing the social body into camps as people vs. elite. Anti-

establishment sentiment manifests itself in populist discourse, targeting institutionalized politics as corrupted, unaligned with the real people, and therefore illegitimate since its authority rests not on the people. Populism will be understood as a constitutive narrative as a set of discursive praxis. These practices aim to constitute the rightfully sovereign people and formulate the political field.

Dealing with a constitutive lack –a derivative of the previously mentioned gap- populism invokes an emancipatory discursive frame in the form of anti-establishment, anti-elite practices as the constituent power that should have been the author of the form and content of the political organization. *What Populism is* then, "populism modestly becomes a discourse, invoking the supremacy of popular sovereignty to claim that corrupt elites are defrauding 'the People' of their rightful political authority. It becomes an anti-elite discourse in the name of the sovereign People." (Aslandis 96)

### **1.1.2. Collective Memory**

Since the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Memory Studies have had a long and established history. The field emerged out of works of experimental psychology and clinical psychoanalysis. Starting with Hugo von Hofmannsthal's coining of the term "collective memory" in 1902, the field emerged out of works of experimental psychology and clinical psychoanalysis. It remained relatively confined to these fields of scholarly work. However, starting in the 1980s, the field experienced drastic change with many expansions. Many scholars focused on operationalizing memory to study the social (Klein 2000). As a result, a wide range of scholars whose disciplinary backgrounds were varied conceptualized and theorized mechanisms of memory. The theorization in a vast spectrum that extends from debates on an individual-based understanding of the term

regarding the constitution of the inner self to how collective memory is essential in the constitution of communities, group identities, and nationhood (Burke 1989; Halbwachs 1992; Zerubavel 1996; Ollick 1999).

Peter Burke's exploration of memory and its relationship with history points to transmitting mechanisms in which collective memory, like individual memory, passes through particular sets of symbols, actions, and history. As in the functioning of individual memory, collective memory is selective in its constitution. Therefore the study of memory must focus on the spatial (its relation to time, space, and specifics of a particular group) dynamics to understand how and in what ways collective memories are shaped (Burke 1989). This focus is derivative of transmitting mechanisms: Memories are constituted and re-constituted through the transition, affected by the events and actors who remember them (Eyerman 2004; Zerubavel 1996; Nora 2002). The constitution of identities in this regard forms a relationship with constituting memories of a collective. In Megill's assessment, "...memory is oriented toward the subject and is concerned with a real or imagined past only because that past is perceived as crucial for the subject, even constitutive of it" (Megill 1998). This simultaneous process of narrating the past in the present to constitute identity and re-narrate (modifying, changing, or preserving) the past shows us that neither memory nor the identity in question can remain in a fixed, pre-determined, and stable state of existence. Literature on collective memory is well aware of the complex nature of memory due to its formation's fluidity, and methodological and theoretical obstacles arise from this formation's intricate network.

Following the memory boom after the 1980s, the emphasis on the complex character of memory opened a space in which numerous scholarly works theorized and conceptualized the relationship between identity formation and collective memory. Critiques within and outside the field pointed out a central problem: The conflation of memory. The conflation is derivative of the field's tendency to establish an equilibrium between the culture and the memory. Equating memory and culture results in conceptual stretching by overextending the term as an explanation.

This extension poses a severe danger since the term's precise meaning is far too complex and entangled with other concepts, such as identity and history (Berliner 2005). The field presents an overarching term that extends everything, and anything that falls into the vast and complex network of collective remembering faces the danger of parity with memory. Parity constitutes a field of study in which culture, identity, and memory are indistinguishable.

To avoid the conflation of memory to a position that everything transmitted from one generation to the next is considered memory, this study will focus on how certain historical narratives are constructed as collective memory. The aim is to understand what is made possible for the public in terms of 'collective memory, the processes in which specific histories constitute people's history. The forms of remembering available to collectives require particular actions, distinguished from individual mechanisms of remembering, forgetting, or transmitting. A methodological danger lingers in conceptualizing collective memory regarding individual forms of remembering, forgetting, or repressing memories. The grave danger of such a form of conceptualization of collective memory is its abolishment of any line between individual

and collective and distinct forms of remembering that are available to each (Kanstenier 1997). The answer to how collectives remember resides in the artifacts created explicitly to this end, strategies that present a past through the operationalization of certain mediums. These mediums vary in the number and forms they may take: Mass media, monuments, rituals, symbols, oral history, literature, cinema, and museums are examples of the rich repertoire of mediums and artifacts that are collectives remembered.

Identification of such mediums as artifacts is not a mere coincidence. This study will position itself in the memory literature corresponding to Kanstenier's line, arguing that a distinction must be made between individual and collective means of remembering. Unlike individual forms of memory formation, the process in which a collective can remember requires the construction of social relationships that attach meaning to certain historical moments, traumas, and artifacts (in the case of monuments and museums, for instance) to remember.

### **1.1.3. Discursive Frames and Constitution of Identity**

Following Aslandis' definition, populism will be understood as a process of discursive framing. Museums, in this understanding, become the sites where these discursive frames are drawn. Interpretation of museums as a field of discursive structure provides us with the following:

Frames provide a diagnosis by identifying 'some event or aspect of social life as problematic and in need of alteration,' then proceed to suggest a prognosis, a proposed solution to the diagnosed problem that specifies what needs to be done, and conclude by circulating a motivational urgency to take corrective action. This theoretical framework extensively applies in social movement studies and resonates strongly with populist

logic. Populist discourse can equally be perceived as the systematic dissemination of a frame that diagnoses reality as problematic because 'corrupt elites' have unjustly usurped the sovereign authority of the 'noble People' and maintains that the solution to the problem resides in the righteous political mobilization of the latter in order to regain power. This, therefore, can be labeled the 'populist frame' – the 'subatomic matter that constitutes populist discourse. (Aslandis 99)

#### **1.1.4. Museums as Exhibitionary Complexes**

Modern museums that we are already accustomed to are 19<sup>th</sup>-century creations. Until that point in history, the exhibitionary complexes we call museums were spaces for a selected few, untouched by the general population. With the Great Exhibition in Louvre Museum following the French Revolution, museums emerged as spaces for the public in a complex and multilayered manner. The museum's transformation into a public space, a space constructed for all the different segments of a given society, incepted its specific functions (Hooper-Greenhill 1989; Chen 2013). The transformation of museums into public spaces corresponds to the aspired change of the public itself. In this regard, museums carried out a shift, not just opening themselves to the public but also morphing into an instrument of the public's constitution. In Hooper-Greenhill's theorization, modern museums emerged as an institution with a mission: Constituting and shaping a disciplined collective through the adjustment to public spaces (not just museums).

Understanding this spatial organization in terms of exhibitionary complexes sheds light on how the exhibitionary complexes starting in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, have become spaces of knowledge production in their ever-changing, often experimental forms of display of the materials in question (Bennet 2013; Hetherington 2013). Bennet's framework of the

exhibitionary complex draws heavily from Hooper-Greenhill's and Foucault's theories regarding space and institutions. In this sense, a closer look at Foucault's understanding of space will illuminate the museum as a governmental assemblage.

Michel Foucault's *Of Other Spaces* was published posthumously in 1986, and ever since, how one should understand this short but essential piece is a matter of dispute.

Heterotopia as a theoretical tool is vital in political geography studies and debates on spatial politics.

Heterotopia is a spatial organization that is an antinomy of the concept of utopia. In contrast to utopias, which are unreal spaces in which a society's perfected form is presented concerning a "direct or inverted analogy with the real space of society" (Foucault 24), heterotopias are real places. These places are different from all other spaces since they represent, contested, and inverted many different spaces simultaneously, existing with each other. It is a space marked by different spatial organization. It is neither like any other spaces surrounding the heterotopia nor like the spaces they reflect and simultaneously preserve within its borders. Through heterotopology, Foucault identifies two distinct types of heterotopia; first of them are heterotopias of crises, which are sacred or forbidden places that are constituted for "individuals who are, concerning society and human environment in which they live, in a state of crises: adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly, etc." (Foucault 24). The second type is heterotopias of deviation, "in which individuals whose behavior is deviant concerning the required mean or norm are placed" (Foucault 25). Examples of such sites include rest homes, psychiatric hospitals, and prisons. Foucault identifies six principles that apply to all heterotopias: Almost all cultures constitute

heterotopias. However, there can be no universal form of heterotopia since all heterotopias are constituted in distinct ways following the time, space, and culture in which they were incepted. All heterotopias possess a precise function determined by the culture in which heterotopia occurs. Therefore the functions of heterotopias are culture-specific. "Heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (Foucault 25). This means that heterotopias can bring together incompatible sites yet can simultaneously be juxtaposed in a given site. Heterotopias are linked with specific times. Heterochrony, in Foucault's terms, suggests that each heterotopia functions "when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time" (Foucault 26). A museum as a site of accumulated time is an excellent example of this principle in identifying the museum's spatial organization. All heterotopias follow a particular system that makes them both isolated and, at the same time, penetrable. All heterotopias "have a function concerning all the space that remains" (Foucault 27). These sites present these functions in different manners. In Foucault's terms, either they function for the creation of a space of illusion, meaning that they expose every real space, or at the other end of the pole, they function for the creation of a space that is as perfect.

In the case of the museum as heterotopia, the literature offers different interpretations due to the ambiguity embedded in heterotopia formulation. Since it is a space of contestation, what it reveals about all remaining spaces is a field of struggle in which the heterotopia's spatial organization of other spaces is questioned. On the other hand, heterotopia is also a space of knowledge production and power. The very spatial

organization of heterotopia also allows it to re-order knowledge in its specific ways of juxtaposing the different spaces simultaneously.

This project will understand museums as both a site of resistance and a site that make order legible (Topinka 2010). It is a site of resistance since framing a trauma, what is included and what is left out, and how the trauma is represented (mediums used) in the exhibitionary complex is a field of contestation. It is a site that makes order legible since, as an apparatus of collective identity formation, the narrative constituted by the museum is also a site "in which epistemes collide and overlap, creating an intensification of knowledge" (Topinka 55). Museum as heterotopia presents us with the theoretical framework in which a site functions to re-order knowledge and power. At the same time, their organization provides the field of contestation since they disrupt the ordering of spaces that they relate to by the merit of their juxtaposing several sites at once (Johnson 2006; Johnson 2008; Elden 2016; Bonazzi 2002).

A museum is a specific spatial organization with certain functions and open zones for instrumentalizing particular ends. The instrumentalization of space for remembering in the case of museums is quite commonplace. As one of the primary examples of strategies of memory politics to build or shape a collective identity, museums often carry out their didactic mission successfully as educational engines (Bennet 2013).

Museumification as an act points to a transformation of a space and a historical period into a discursive frame, authoritatively constructing what can be known and how that very known should be interpreted. Museums are sites of what is knowable, and as apparatuses of meaning-making, they play a significant role in the constitution of

identities. Nevertheless, the constitution of identities through collective remembering provided by history museums not only relies on the meaning-making through the historical memories put forward but also on the affective aspect of museums, especially in the cases of history and trauma-site museums. Recent museology includes emotions as an essential aspect of the mission and purpose of history museums through the construction effect. As a result, the meaning produced by museums is twofold: Not only does the narrative put forward by the museum construct meaning and historical narrative for collectives to remember, but also how and in what ways collectives should feel (the emotional attribution to spaces and times also plays a pivotal role in the making of the meaning) also in the range of museum's mission (Watson 2015).

In this regard, museums become the site where the populist construction of politics establishes its hegemonic ground through appropriating time and space in the heterotopic organization of museums, producing knowable sites for identifying the new political subjectivity.

Populist's history becomes the terrain that a new political subjectivity manifested in its a) historical victimhood, which must be narrated for the incepting the notion of real people, b) discursive frames in which this history is written and performed, and c) prefigurative politics, which carries the populist's emancipatory discourse overcoming that very historical victimhood.

## **1.2. Methodology**

For this research, I conducted fieldwork in five museums: The Ulucanlar Prison Museum, Memory July 15 Museum in İstanbul, Kahramankazan Martyrs of July 15, and Democracy Museum, Gaziantep July 15 Museum, and Ankara July 15 Democracy

Museum between 2018-2022. The fieldwork in Ulucanlar Museum started first, as the museum has been open since 2010. Between 2018 and 2022, I had ten visits to the museum to photograph the museum complex, conduct interviews with the curation team, and perform ad hoc interviews on the spot with museum-goers. Ulucanlar Prison Museum is quite famous in Ankara, meaning there were almost always available museum-goers within the site.

The fieldwork on July 15 museums involves fewer visits to the museums. Each July 15, museums open briefly for commemoration purposes on July 15 of the respectable year they are found, yet close down after the commemorations in July to finish exhibitionary complexes and museum installations. In addition to these developments starting in March 2020, due to COVID-19, the museums were not functional for over a year due to the high health risks they carry during the pandemic as enclosed public spaces. After the first visit from December 2019 until April 2021, museum fieldwork was impossible. Starting from April 2021, I have had interviews with several museum staff and curation teams and ad-hoc interviews with museum-goers on five different visits to the museum. I have conducted fieldwork in Kahramankazan in two separate instances; I was the sole museum-goer in each. More importantly, the museum curation team was reallocated to the construction and design of the Ankara July 15 Museum, making them unavailable during fieldwork. Ankara Museum, like others, opened its doors on July 15, 2021, and immediately closed down for further development of the exhibition. I conducted fieldwork in the museum between January 2022 and June 2022, with seven visits to the museum. The museum was functional only between November 2021 and August 2022 and closed down again for the reconstruction of the glass dome in the final hall of the

museum. However, the temporary closing down of the museum provided me with the chance to interview with the museum curation team and, therefore, the curation team of Kahramankazan museum, as they were only available.

Limitations regarding the fieldwork: Museum staff and officials, curation teams, and museum-goers were all quite helpful during the interviews and the fieldwork. The interviews consist of open-ended questions on how these exhibitions come to life. The main question in all interviews was, "What this museum tells us?". One positive aspect of interviewing museum staff and curation teams is that they were very enthusiastic about sharing what they know, personal anecdotes, and overall knowledge of the topic at hand, both the museumification of trauma sites and the master narratives of the museum displays. Unfortunately, the significant limitation of the fieldwork lies in the political conjuncture in which these museums operate; each is a state institution under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. At each interview, there was a point that, in similar veins, the interviewees shared that "well, I cannot comment on that" when asked about how you position the museum and contemporary politics.

The first chapter focuses on the inception of the Ulucanlar Prison Museum as a memory space and the particular temporality the site offered in the context of the memory politics of AKP on the road to the 2010 referendum. The aim is to understand the political context that brought the site as a valuable instrument of agonistic memory politics AKP and locate the spatial configuration of the site within itself and the relationship of the site with the broader urban politics of the AKP government.

The second chapter focuses on the July 15 museums opened after the failed coup attempt of 2016. The three museums in İstanbul, Ankara, and Ankara/Kahramankazan represent trauma sites incorporated into everyday politics through commemorative practices. The coup attempt also marks a drastic change in society and Turkish politics, making the museums all the more interesting the contextualize the alteration within the AKP's rhetoric of peoplehood and the enemies.

The third and final chapter focuses on the centrality of collective trauma in AKP's memory regime and the political temporalities the populist identity construction requires to establish a sense of belonging. AKP's 22 years in office witnessed many shifts in their discursive practices regarding collective memory while staying relatively loyal to the overarching narrative points during this time. The aim is to understand continuities and discontinuities within the memory regime of AKP through the displays and overarching narrative within the memory spaces of Ulucanlar and July 15 museums.

## CHAPTER II

### ULUCANLAR PRISON MUSEUM AND POPULIST COLLECTIVE MEMORY

#### 2.1. Prison's History

Ulucanlar Prison Museum is on Ulucanlar Street no: 63, in Ulus, the capital of Ankara's old city center. Ulus is the literal translation of the word nation. It was the heart of the newly found Republic. Ulus district was reflective of the ideology of the Republic, which was based on a Western and secular vision (Yalım 2010). Ulucanlar Prison was part of the urban planning of the Early Republic as a modern carceral institution.

Ulucanlar Prison was constructed in the Ankara Old City Urban Plan to use the land's relation to nearby fields at the border of the plan by building a modern prison, which would use the land for recreational and rehabilitative practices for the inmates. The Ministry of Domestic Affairs commissioned the complex for construction in 1925 to erect a general prison. Loercher's plan states that before the little Ottoman town became the capital, the site Hamamönü/Ulucanlar region had houses and fields (Ulucanlar Tevkifhaneden Müzeye, 2010; TMMOB: Kent Düşleri Ulucanlar Project, 2010).

Although some sources suggest that the site might have been a cemetery before the construction of the prison, apart from these accounts, there is no evidence of the former

function of the site. The map of the site drawn by the Office of Maps in 1924 shows the site as empty, with no indication of a cemetery or any other construction. However, oral historical sources suggest that some of the buildings in the complex were built before the prison, and the functions of the buildings are stated as military warehouses or stables. Still, there is no written documentation of the building(s). The first photographic documentation of the prison complex is from 1997. Aerial site photos archived later additions, such as the 8th and 12th Wards. These additions indicate that in the 1990s, the prison's space usage dramatically differed from the state of the site in 2006. The site served as a prison for 81 years, where Independence Tribunals were held—coups of 1960, 1971, and 1980 each played a crucial role in the incarceration of political prisoners.

## **2.2. Museumification of Ulucanlar**

Under the JDP rule, Turkey expands investment in building carceral facilities starting in the early 2000s. Ulucanlar's function as a prison expired under these new investments as the inmates were transferred into the newly built Sincan Prison in Ankara in 2006 (Ulucanlar Tevkifhaneden Müzeye, 2010). The Ankara branch of the progressive Chamber of Architects and Engineers (Türk Mühendis ve Mimar Odaları Birliği, TMMOB in Turkish) applied for an investigation of the site by a team consisting of architects and experts in the field to determine the state of the former prison complex. With the permission of the Justice Department, the team made a comprehensive study of the site. The fieldwork on the site formed the bases of the TMMOB's application for the official protection of the building complex. Outcomes of the site assessment showed that several buildings within the complex qualified as tangible cultural heritage under the Law of Protection of Cultural and Natural Assets (*Kültür Ve Tabiat Varliklarini Koruma*

*Kanunu*). Following the affirmation of the site as a tangible cultural heritage, National Architecture Students' Ideas Project was born. The main idea was to accept submissions from undergraduate and graduate-level architecture students for the museumification of the site "for creating an urban memory and democratic tradition for the city" (34). Seventy-nine projects were submitted in April 2007 for transforming the site into a museum. The following month the winning projects were announced. In 2008, the Ulucanlar Prison's site was transferred to the jurisdiction of the Altındağ Municipality from the Ministry of Justice to be utilized as a museum, movie plateau, and social and cultural center. TMMOB expedition to the former prison site archived that the architecture of a) the main building, hospital building, and the Hamam in the site are the buildings that represent the characteristics of the first national architectural period, b) the wards from no:1 to 6 and no:10 are buildings that represent the characteristics of the first national architectural period, their functions and schematic plans are one of a kind, c) concrete constructions that are prisons specific, such as visitation booths and d) concrete buildings (Ulucanlar Tevkifhaneden Müzeye, 2010; TMMOB: Kent Düşleri Ulucanlar Project, 2010).

Following the transfer to the Altındağ Municipality, the sites' museumification began and opened its doors to the public in 2010. The Ulucanlar Prison Museum's processes of museumification, the display, and the political context started its function. The museum site created an intersection of memory politics, a memory of the past that was highly relevant in 2010. As a public space and a memory museum, the Ulucanlar Museum was utilized as an instrument of the JDP government's populist discourse. When it first

opened its doors, it was at the center of the constitutional politics of the referendum in 2010 by bringing the memory of past political violence to the present.

### **2.3. Ulucanlar Prison Museum**

The museum entrance is located in a small shed next to the building complex's old main building when the complex functioned as a prison. Two wax sculptures of soldiers welcome the museum-goer as they enter the museum through a relatively spacious garden. After the entrance fee, one first sees a poem on a sign next to the door. The sign reads:

"If someday you happen to visit the jail,

After you rub your hands over the dusty walls

and inhale the smell of humidity,

When rats share your bread,

When your watch starts working, you miss the freedom,

and time stops...

And when you have time for yourself, stop to think.

How much of your life do you think is constituted by freedom?"

The sign ends "to the prison," followed by an arrow towards the entrance. The door leads to a small staircase down and up Adnan Menderes Boulevard. Adnan Menderes Boulevard is not a boulevard but a spacious corridor once the eighth Ward and entrance to the women's Ward. The eighth Ward was demolished after the prison's closing and

during the museumification phase, which made executive decisions on which buildings to remain and which to demolish.

Right out of the gate, the Ulucanlar Prison Museum severely rebuilds and intervenes with the trauma site by physically altering the site for museum-making and symbolically re-names the new corridor after another victim of political violence. However, he was not a prisoner at the site, with Adnan Menderes hanged by the military junta, followed by the 1960s coup d'etat. The boulevard leads first to the former Women's Ward, which remains intact but does not include to museum display, as one of the curators commented that the museum display is based on the buildings erected in 1925 originally. As a result, the Women's Ward is not part of the display due to a newer addition to the prison complex and erased from the possibility of being remembered on equal footing with the other parts of the exhibition. However, the museum displays one of the paintings depicting the everyday lives of the women inmates on the right wall of Adnan Menderes boulevard, where the entrance of the Women's Ward is closed.

The corridor leads from the Women's Ward to the ninth and tenth wards, or "Hilton Ward," where high-profile political prisoners were held during their time in the Ulucanlar Prison. The nickname of Hilton Ward is a reference to the famous hotel chain, as the ninth and tenth wards were for a smaller number of inmates (around 7-8 people), and the conditions were infinitely better compared to other wards that were overpopulated (the capacity of ordinary wards were around 60-70 people, yet occupied by often around 100-150 persons) almost constantly during the time of the site as a prison between 1925-2006. Many artists, journalists, and politicians were the guests of the Hilton Ward, and two of the most notable names are former Prime Minister Bülent

Ecevit and right-wing author, poet, and ideolog Necip Fazıl Kısakürek. These two names, among other celebrities on the museum display, such as Muhsin Yazıcıoğlu, Nazım Hikmet Ran, and Deniz Gezmiş, all come from different sides of the political spectrum and become narrative devices. Like the usage of Adnan Menderes's name to indicate a 'boulevard'—or a corridor in the museum—other important political names like the above maintain a symbolic function for the museum. The names, popularized in the media, become floating signifiers, whereby the persons themselves are lost; what remains is a representation of trauma.

The diversity of the victims regarding their political alignments is one of the highlights of the museum display. Throughout the exhibition, one of the continuous themes is the equity of the coups and military juntas in incarcerating people from different political alignments, both from left and right.

A little right to the Hilton Ward, the entrance to solitary confinement cells is positioned. The museum display takes museum-goers into a dark, poorly lit corridor with confinement cells arranged on the right side. Some cells display wax sculptures of inmates, visible through the little holes in the cell doors, accompanied by wax mice, further underlining the dire conditions of the incarcerated people. Confinement Ward, the display of inmates, accompanied by the post-fact produced voice recording, involves harsh wind sounds, metal clicking, and sounds of torture of a fictional inmate who yells, "I have done nothing wrong! I was just protecting my honor!" as the museum-goers walk in the corridor. The sensory devices like visual and audio details enhance the museum from not just a few passages but one that provides a human experience. The confinement cells are used for inmates whose crimes were considered too dangerous to

let into the prison's general population and for the inmates sentenced to disciplinary punishment during their time in the Ulucanlar Prison. As the official booklet "Memory of 81 Years: Ulucanlar" notes, the museum-goers "...walk through the rear corridor that opens to the building where cells for one person are located, you will consider yourself lucky as you see the sky and sun." (26). The dread of the inmates' and the visitors' freedom are put at odds throughout the display and exhibition's narrative to intensify further the emphasis on the inmates' traumatic experience and the act of witnessing carried by the museum-goers. The same booklet emphasizes the authenticity of the confinement segment of the museum as one of the parts is preserved as it used to be.

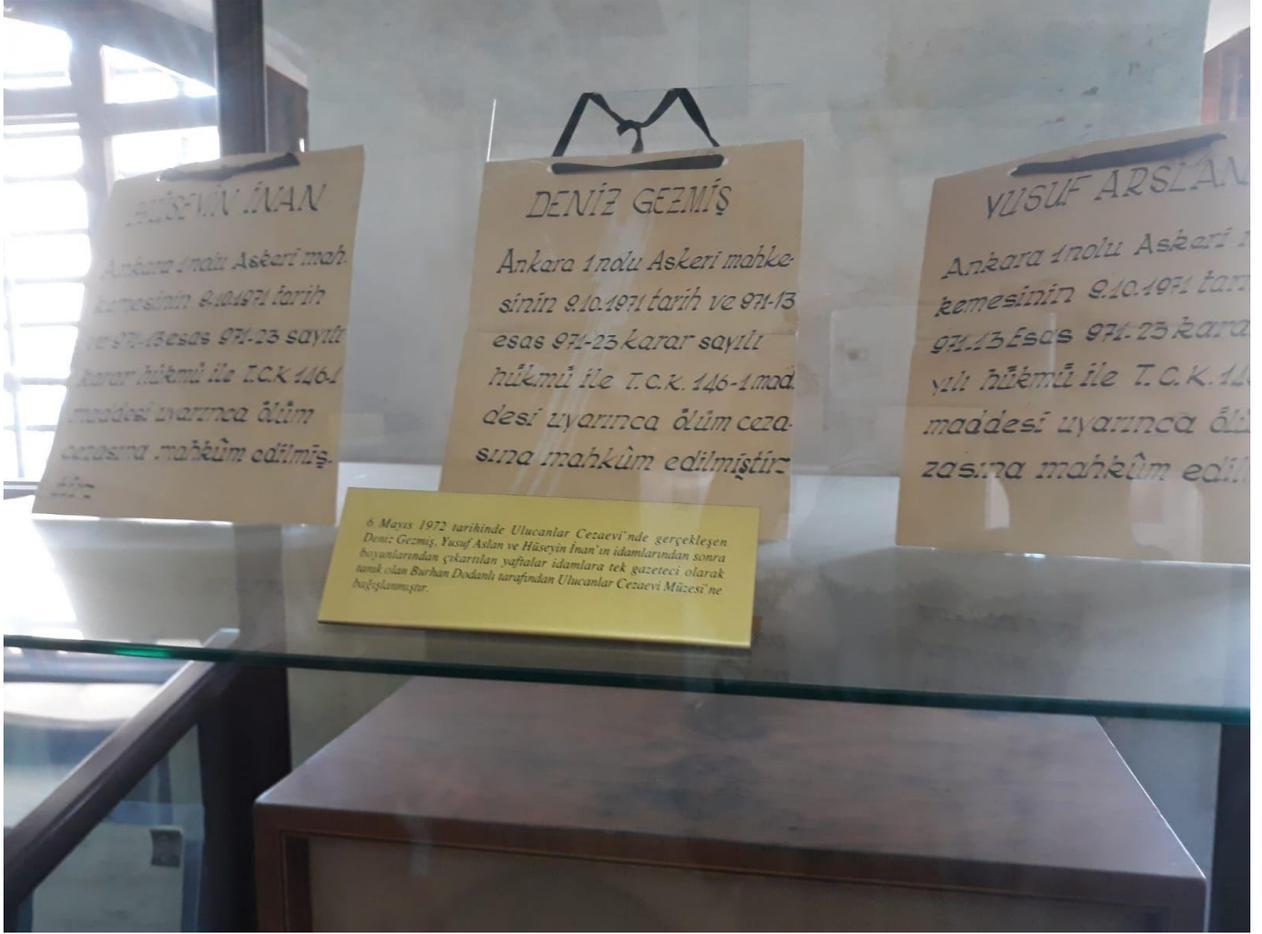
The next step of the exhibition is prison yards of the 4th, fifth, and sixth wards and the wards themselves, including the former seventh Ward, which is now transformed into a cinema salon, with a vintage movie projection machine and movie posters from the 1960s and onwards. The original cinema salon is positioned outside the display but in the museum complex, which museum-goers can visit after the end of the exhibition, in the museum's art & culture center segments. Seventh or the Cinema Ward is used for documentaries on Ulucanlar Prison, and movies in the Ulucanlar Prison, such as *Uçurtmayı Vurmasınlar*, which the film had initially shot in the Women's Ward, now cannot be visited by museum-goers.

The fourth and fifth wards consist of wax sculptures and tombstones for the famous inmates, when and why they were prisoners in Ulucanlar. The hyper-realistic sculptures are designed not to reflect any names commemorated throughout the museum but of the ordinary people who were once inmates. Their facial features are modeled after the former inmates' photographs, but their designs are original. The wax sculptures are

strategically used to intensify the ambiance of authenticity, as sculptures pose in everyday activities, such as playing instruments, drinking tea, debating, or praying. The Memory of 81 Years Ulucanlar notes that wards "were created in the circumstances of the past,...and evoke old Turkish Films" (30) as the material used in the wards is either original pieces found in prison or curated in a historically appropriate fashion (Memory of 81 Years: Ulucanlar 2017). However, it is not stated which era the materials are precisely appropriate as the museum display tries to cover 81 years of history. The museum display at this point tries extensively to curate a politically relevant environment, a space that museum-goer can relate to, yet at the same time, it poses a sense of nostalgia; that is, the memory of it is beyond the museum-goers' reach. The museum is explicit in what it displays: The memory and lives of the inmates are extended by hyper-realistic sculptures and Yeşil Çam's proper clothing to invoke a nostalgic ambiance that is still contemporary.



*Figure 1: Ulucanlar Prison Museum Ward*



*Figure 2: Memorabilia*

The Sixth Ward is the museum's most extensive set of exhibition pieces. Most of the inmates' memorabilia and personal items are displayed here. They range from Bülent Ecevit's hat, Yılmaz Güney's tie, the jacket owned by Deniz Gezmiş, Yusuf Aslan's scarf, the shirt of Hüseyin İnan, which had to be cut to remove it after the execution of İnan, Muhsin Yazıcıoğlu's praying cap. These items are displayed in glass panels on the right side of the Ward, with explanatory labels near them. On the left side, the Ward has bunk beds formerly seen in previous wards and, again, the name tags of the prisoners in the Ward.

The next step in the exhibition after the sixth Ward is a small corridor with four solitary confinement cells, followed by yards of the first and second wards. These wards do not have sculptures, yet some wall writings consist of famous sayings\*. The fifth and sixth wards have two yards, each for one Ward, and they are also used as movie set pieces for TV shows and films that take place or involve scenes in prison.

The final step in the exhibition is the courtyard: This part of the site is one of the most intervened spaces in the museumification of the prison. It includes the bathhouse, non-contact visitation booths, the gift shop of the museum, and the gallow. While the bathhouse is preserved authentically, regarding the original state of the place, the courtyard today was almost nonexistent when the building complex functioned as a prison since the non-contact visitation booths once occupied almost the entirety of the yard. To curate more spacious space, many of the spatial organizations once made the Ulucanlar Prison notorious erased for a more accessible museum-going experience. The courtyard is a vast area, and the visitation booths that museum-goers can see are only a tiny corner of the yard. The sanitization of the space in the museum has been criticized by many; former inmates who experienced the dire condition of Ulucanlar were very vocal about the interventions at the site.

#### **2.4. The Gallow**

The gallow is the exhibition's centerpiece, and the display item that is the mnemonic strategies within the trauma site museum is focused excessively. The gallow is the last thing museum-goers see before they exit the museum. The Ulucanlar Prison witnessed eighteen executions, seventeen of them consisting of political prisoners and one common criminal, between 1926 and 1983. The first executions were İskilipli Mehmet

Atıf Hoca and Mufti of Babaeski Ali Rıza Hoca on February 3, 1926. They were sentenced to death by Independence Tribunals, which were extra-legal courts set during the Independence War to deal with military deserters. After the establishment of the Republic, tribunals became an essential instrument for the newly found regime. İskilipli Atıf Hoca was arrested in 1925 after the infamous hat law because his books and other writings openly criticized the Westernization processes during the early Republic. *Tesettür-ü Şer* (1923), *Men-i Müskirat* (1924), and *Frenk Mukatilliği ve Şapka* (1925) were all works that criticized, Western lifestyle and promoted much more Islamic norms for clothing and consumption of alcohol. Mufti of Babaeski was arrested for "provoking the people of the city Giresun against the hat wearing." (Ulucanlar Tevkifhaneden Müzeyeye, 2010) The museum material provides that Ali Rıza Hoca had never been part of any political party, organization, or movement.

The next time the Ulucanlar Prison witnessed executions was August 26, 1926, and four people were hanged at the site due to the İzmir Assassination Case. The plot was the assassination of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who would have visited the city of İzmir if the plan had been exposed before it could happen. The four names were prominent in the Committee of Union and Progress and were found guilty of participating in the plot. These people were former Minister of Finance Cavit Bey, parliament member Hilmi Bey, Nail Bey, and former governor of Ankara Abdulkadir Bey. They were found guilty by constitutional articles 55th and 57th, which cover the crimes against the constitution and the state, and the punishment was execution. From Prison to Museum: Ulucanlar (Tevkifhaneden Müzeyeye: Ulucanlar), the official book published by the museum, includes an anecdote regarding the late Bülent Ecevit, as his father Fahri Bey served as a

physician in the newly opened prison in 1925. He was the one who signed the post-mortem reports of the four execution victims. In a pretty dramatic fashion, the book's narrative articulates what might have been the thoughts of Fehmi Bey, that his son was not in the Ulucanlar for execution. Still, only a three months visit, "Who knows maybe his father (of the former prime minister Bülent Ecevit) prayed after the events of that night (of executions)... a father's prayer...maybe that was heard" (27). Dramatization is one of the most used narrative devices throughout the museum's display. From the playlist consisting of famous prison and folk songs played in the yards to emphasis on a movie-like ambiance of the museum in booklets, the authentic experiences of the inmates are narrated via an implied innocence and victimhood of the people.



*Figure 3: Newspaper Archives*

Between 1926 and 1964, there were no executions in prison. The following executions were Fethi Gürcan and Talat Aydemir, who were found guilty of attempted coup d'etat after the 1960 coup and the 1961 Constitution in 1964. On June 27, 1964, Fethi Gürcan and eight days later, on August 5, 1964, Talat Aydemir were hanged in the Ulucanlar Prison. An interesting departure regarding the narrative in the museum is surrounding the Fethi Gürcan and Talat Aydemir. Former victims of the death penalty and, chronologically speaking, future executions are all narrated in terms of the victims' alleged innocence or emphasis on the political conditions that led to their demises. The

exception is the executions of the two coup attempters since the shortest segment in the From Prison to Museum is dedicated to them "This was not their first try...Aydemir, who was pardoned for his prior attempted coup, lead Fethi Gürcan to rope this time..." (28). Museum display utilizes the histories of the coup d'etats and the political violence following the martial law periods; the silent enemy, or at least the overarching unifier of the diverse character of the victims, is the military or republican tutelage, or instances such as Independence Tribunals throughout the exhibition.

The subsequent executions took place on May 6, 1972, after the military memorandum of 1971. The museum narrative often establishes itself through the testimony of the site's thanatopolitics via the memory of coups. From Prison to Museum notes, "some argue that certain buildings in the Ulucanlar Prison were built for military warehouses. Since its history dictates it should have been used for military purposes, the military presence was not part of its history; 1960's, 1971's and especially the 1980's coup" (37). The names of the people who were sentenced to the death penalty were Deniz Gezmiş, Yusuf Aslan, and Hüseyin İnan. Deniz Gezmiş, Yusuf Aslan, and Hüseyin İnan were members of THKO (People's Liberation Army of Turkey), a left-wing organization that utilized strategies of armed struggle. Armed conflict between left and right-wing organizations and movements led to the 1971 military memorandum as the army started Sledgehammer Operation to incarcerate people who were associated with armed struggle and/or these movements. In this context, Deniz Gezmiş, Hüseyin İnan, and Yusuf Aslan were caught separately and put on the trial THKO-1 to decide their punishments. The eighteen people on trial got the death penalty, but the remaining fifteen sentences were changed or dropped except for the three names. The death sentences had to be voted in

the national assembly and senate between 1960 and 1980. On March 11, 1972, two hundred and thirty-eight yes, fifty-three no, and six undecided votes were counted in the national assembly. On March 17, out of 141 senators, 105 voted yes to the death penalty, so the decision was finalized.

The following executions were due to the aftermath of the September 12, 1980 coup d'etat; the coup's impact subsequently changed Turkey's political, social, and economic relations. The thanatopolitics of the 1980 coup included mass incarceration of left- and right-wing politicians, activists, journalists, artists, and ordinary citizens. Necdet Adalı and Mustafa Pehlivanoglu were sentenced to death in Ulucanlar Prison on October 8, 1980, almost a month after the coup. "Military junta established equity in killing and hanged two young men, one from the left and one from the right" (From Prison to Museum: Ulucanlar, 38), is one of the critical statements by the museum display to understand the master narrative of the exhibition, in which the recurring theme of equity in political violence, that everyone was the victims. Necdet Adalı sentenced the death immediately after the coup. He was already in prison for three years since he was found guilty of collaborating in a shooting of a coffee house and killing two individuals in 1977. He was in high school when the incident happened. His defense was that he was tortured during interrogation and was innocent. Mustafa Pehlivanoglu was found guilty of participating in the Balgat Massacre, in which right-wing Ülkücü militias shot three coffee houses. Both briefly stayed in Ulucanlar and were prisoners in the Mamak Military Prison when they were sentenced to death. However, their executions occurred in the Ulucanlar Prison and arrived briefly before the executions. Theirs was the first execution of the 1980 coup.

Erdal Eren was hanged in Ulucanlar two months after Mustafa Pehlivanoglu and Necdet Adalı. "Official lies can even creep into a tombstone; Erdal Eren's age was officially changed by court decision to be hanged" (From Prison to Museum, 71). He was found guilty of the murder of Zekirya Önder, a gendarme officer assigned to the protest of METU student Sinan Suner, and was shot by Erdal Eren. He was 16 when the incident happened and 17 when he was sentenced to the death penalty; "only coup perpetrators could stomach to hang a minor, regardless of the law" From Prison to Museum (71). Erdal Eren was hanged on December 13, 1980.

On March 27, Fikri Arıkan and on August 13, 1982, Ali Bülent Orkan were hanged in Ulucanlar Prison. Their executions were the final ones in the prison complex. Arıkan was sentenced to death for the murder of Veli Güneş and Halim Kaplan in 1978. Both Arıkan and Orkan were Ülkücü militias, and their victims were left-wingers. Orkan was found guilty of participating in Piyangotepe Massacre, which killed seven people in 1979.



*Figure 4: The Gallow*

The museum's last exhibition, the gallows behind bars, has two plates, one on the bars and the other is on the right wall of the small square where it positioned. The plate on the wall includes the names of the people who were hanged and the dates of the executions.

The plate positioned on the bars reads, "the death penalty in Turkey has been removed by law no: 5218 passed by the national assembly in 14.07.2004". After the gallows, museum-goers walk towards the exit of the museum.

**ULUCANLAR CEZAEVİNDE  
GERÇEKLEŞTİĞİ TESPİT EDİLEBİLEN İNFAZLAR  
(1925- 1983)**

<i>İskilipli Mehmet Atıf Hoca</i>	- 3 Şubat 1926
<i>Babaeski Müftüsü Ali Rıza Hoca</i>	- 3 Şubat 1926
<i>Maliye Nazırı Cavit Bey</i>	- 26 Ağustos 1926
<i>Dr. Nazım Bey</i>	- 26 Ağustos 1926
<i>Milletvekili Hilmi Bey</i>	- 26 Ağustos 1926
<i>Nail Bey</i>	- 26 Ağustos 1926
<i>Abdulkadir Bey (Eski Ankara Valisi)</i>	- 1 Eylül 1926
<i>Süvari Fethi Gürcan</i>	- 27 Haziran 1964
<i>Albay Talat Aydemir</i>	- 5 Temmuz 1964
<i>Deniz Gezmiş</i>	- 6 Mayıs 1972
<i>Yusuf Aslan</i>	- 6 Mayıs 1972
<i>Hüseyin İnan</i>	- 6 Mayıs 1972
<i>Necdet Adalı</i>	- 8 Ekim 1980
<i>Mustafa Pehlivanoglu</i>	- 8 Ekim 1980
<i>Erdal Eren</i>	- 13 Aralık 1980
<i>Fikri Arıkan</i>	- 27 Mart 1982
<i>Ednan Kavaklı (Adli Suçlu)</i>	- 13 Haziran 1982
<i>Ali Bülent Orkan</i>	- 13 Ağustos 1982

*Figure 5: List of People who were executed in Ulucanlar Prison*

The Ulucanlar Prison Museum displays the memory of political violence within the prison complex in a threefold sense. The first layer of the exhibition rests on the memory of incarceration and the dire conditions of prison life within the complex. The second layer is mediated via newspaper articles within the entrances of each Ward accompanied

by the inmates' letters to loved ones, connecting the personal memories of the victims of political violence with the broader histories of the coups and periods of political violence. The third and final layer narrates the death penalty's history and commemorates the executed people. The exhibition draws a parallel between the history of political violence and the history of the death penalty. Interviews with the museum curator team who created the content in each exhibition segment indicate that "what is memorable and most important about the site is the executions and the extent of the coup-led violence" (\*). More importantly, the variety of the victims regarding their backgrounds, and the famous names among the executed, lead to the central themes of the museum display. The gallows behind bars, and the date engraved on the plate, ended the exhibition, as the national assembly put practice behind bars. However, The display's conflation of the death penalty's history with coup-led political violence into each other curates a narrative that the end of the death penalty also marks the end of political violence, as visitors can leave with ease that the collective trauma caused by the practice and the context it was used can finally be behind bars and the visitors. The Ulucanlar Prison Museum aims to "assure the visitors that these visceral and intense feelings the museum summons in the visitors are confined to the past and that one ought to be grateful and content with the present regime, as will be shown in our discussion of the gallows put behind the bar" (Uğur-Çınar & Altınok 2022)\*

## CHAPTER III

### JULY 15 MUSEUMS AND INSTANTANEOUS MEMORIALIZATION

In the first part of the chapter, I will give a descriptive account of the three July 15 museums, the Memory July 15 Museum in İstanbul, Kahramankazan Martyrs of July 15, and Democracy Museum and Ankara July 15 Democracy Museum. The first half includes the museum exhibitions' form, narrative, and description. The second part is on the overall memory regime of the AKP governments regarding July 15 and the political context each museum opened its doors.

#### **3.1. Memory July 15 Museum**

Regarding the scope of its display, the Memory July 15 Museum is the most comprehensive and ambitious among the July 15 museums. The museum covers the events of the coup attempt, commemorates the martyrs, and displays the broader context of coup d'etats and the history of colonial violence. It is located on the Anatolian side of the Bosphorus Bridge in Kuzguncuk Nevinhal Street No: 12, İstanbul. The bridge has seen the most violent and memorable instances of civilians vs. military on the night of the coup attempt.



*Figure 6: Martyrs' Grove and Makam*

The museum's entrance starts with the Nakkaştepe Millet Garden; as the path forks, one leads to the Millet Garden and the other towards the museum. The path toward the museum has 251 blue-pine trees, each labeled after the name of one of the martyrs. The road leads the museum-goer to the first construction on the site, the Martyrdom Monument. The monument consists of a dome with three entrances. The dome's inside has two seat theaters and a fountain in the middle. On the inside is a small stone wall engraved with the names of the martyrs. The Sela never stops in the monument, praying for the souls of the martyrs. The dome was designed as intertwined branches as it symbolizes tree branches joining together, representing the people coming together, and

from the openings between branches, there is a bridge between the monument and the martyrs.



*Figure 7: Makam*

The Ankara July 15 Museum will later utilize the same symbolism.

From the monument, museum-goers take small stairs to the entrance of the museum complex. The building is designed to resemble a mosque as the triangular roof hovers on the entrance and ends with a minaret. The praying-room part of the building is called by museum staff a mosque, but by no definition can the building be classified as one as it can neither serve the function nor possess the necessary constructions within. However,

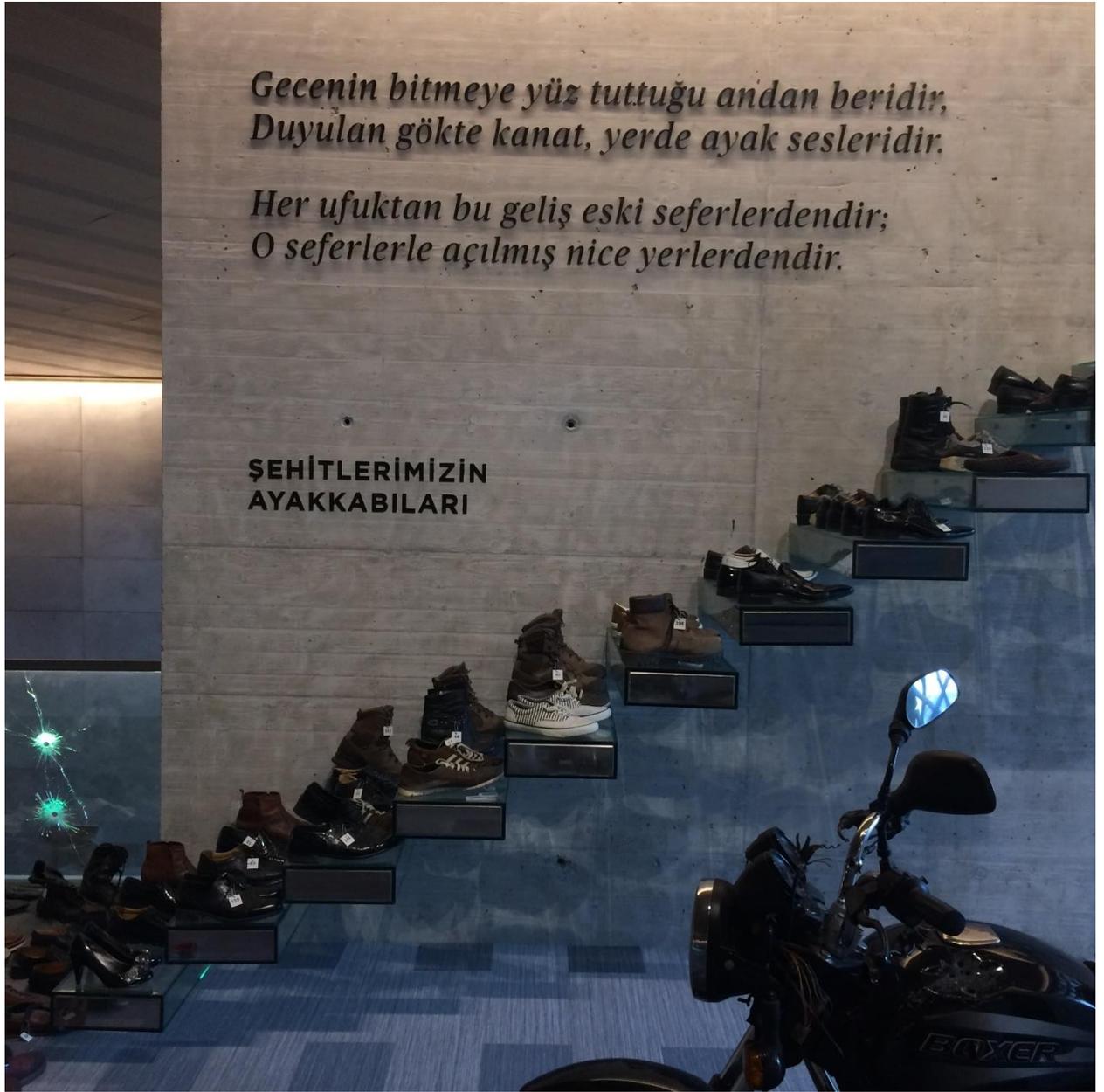
the museum complex is built in the shape of a mosque, making it a de-facto mosque sculpture since the function of the complex as a mosque is missing. On the side of the museum wall, large letters write "To Never Forget," As the museum-goer enters the building, they first come across a wall writing "what you will see is your story..." in Turkish, English, and Arabic.



*Figure 8: Memory July 15 Museum*

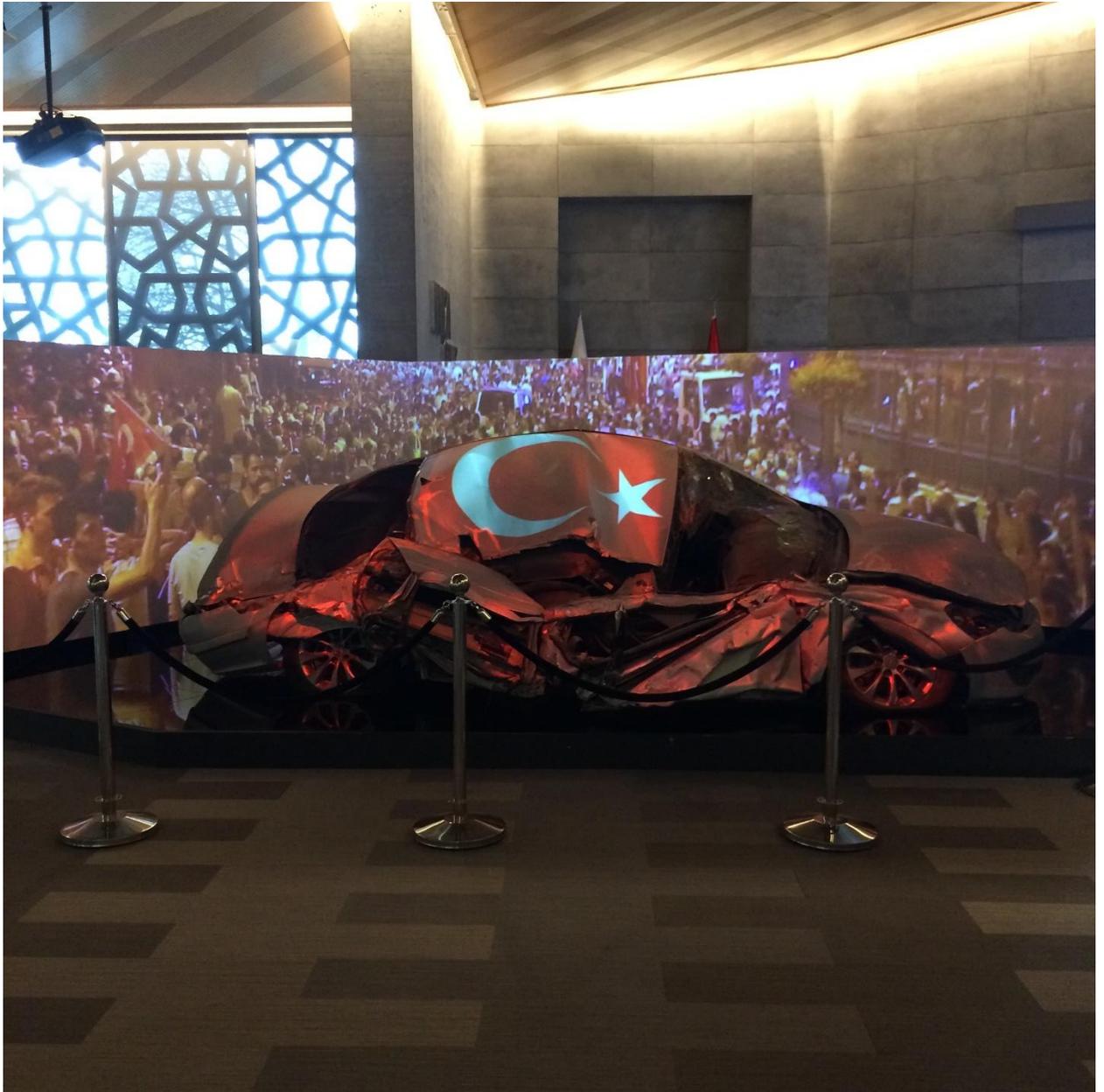
A flat-screen of smaller rectangular screens on the wall's right showcases Turkey's beauty and mega projects. The screen notes, "*State and Nation, Peace and Prosperity.*" The screen and installation as a tool have already been used in the museum display, yet the Peace and Prosperity was a newer addition, installed early in the summer of 2022. The first floor of the display in the Memory July 15 Museum is shaped like the letter V

and leads to the corridor with screens on the right side, a staircase taking museum-goers to the second layer of the museum, and a space ending with a balcony. The Balcony segment consists of a car crushed by the tanks nearby the street to the museum site in Üsküdar. The car is surrounded by screens reflecting an everlasting fire. Moving beyond the crushed car, the museum-goer sees 251 pairs of shoes; each pair is donated by the families of those who lost their lives. Museum staff notes that the initial plan was to showcase the shoe people wore on July 15, but many were either lost or heavily damaged because of the night's events and how people were martyred.



*Figure 9: Shoes of the Martyrs*

This segment involves only one screen, *The Price*, showcasing the aftermath of the violence, pictures from the national assembly building, streets, and people who have been martyred and destroyed properties.



*Figure 10: Car Wreckage*

In the second part of the first floor, the corridor has three screens: *Chaos, Coup Preparation, and Attack!* The videos are curated to highlight the night's events, all coming from the widely available sources of video recordings from the night, news agencies, individual cell phone recordings, and security footage. The corridor ends with a video room, screening a mini-documentary that the content derives from the previous

three screens. To arrive at the second floor, visitors need to take the stairs down, which have two, each on one side of the small theater. An enormous screen is showcasing the Yenikapı Rally after the coup attempt on August 7, 2016, which was attended by not only President Erdoğan, Binali Yıldırım, Devlet Bahçeli, and other prominent political figures but also Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the leader of the main opposition party. The Yenikapı Rally was an event of unity, and resilience of the state, a story of people who were victors of democracy. The video screening, and the overall theme of the first floor, tie neatly with the unification of the leader, the state, and the people. The video even incorporates unity, the main opposition, which is a surprising development for AKP narrative-wise.

The second floor, after the theater part, is where the museum display moves beyond a mere trauma-site museum, just like in the case of Ulucanlar Museum, drawing a parallel between the global history of colonialization and coups and Turkey's particular history within this broader context. Moving beyond the theater screen, the museum-goer is now in an enormous hall. The ceiling has an installation consisting of 251 doves, representing the peace and souls of the martyrs, starting on the ceiling right above the stairs that descend to the theater and ending on the wall of the hall, which has the names of the 251 martyrs. Where the names end on the wall, three touchscreens have a demographic and martyrdom information database of the 251 names. In a necro-cartography project, each person has a segment on their name, age, and the place of martyrdom, in which museum-goers can see where these people fall victim to the coup attempt, city by city.

On the left side of the screen, the wall has an installation in the shape of a half-sphere, consisting of pictures of people who were martyred, scenes from the night, scenes from

the Yenikapı Rally, and democracy vigils place overall the country in the following days of June 15, 2016. Underneath the installation is six glass cases featuring memorabilia from the night. The first one is the bullet that was taken out of the leg of Colonel Mahmut Pınarbaşı, a veteran of the night. The second one showcases the motorcycle helmet of Veteran Bilal Özyıldırım, which was hit by a bullet on that night. The third and fourth memorabilia come from iconic and important figures of the night. The third belongs to Martyr Ömer Halisdemir's knife and crimson cap, signature items of the military's special forces outfits. Halisdemir is remembered for his heroic deed on the night\*.



*Figure 11: Memorabilia*

The fourth item is the cell phone of journalist Hande Fırat, who was live on TV the night of the coup attempt. What makes her cell phone incredibly significant is that President Erdoğan had his first appearance on the night via her cell phone, joining the live TV with a facetime call to Hande Fırat. Hande Fırat aired the President's speech via her phone to the camera and everyone watching, explaining what was happening and stating, "this is a coup attempt." The moment is historic as the President calls citizens to take to the streets and resist the coup attempt. The cellphone glass case also has a small screen embedded to showcase the video recording of the iconic call. A small label informs the visitors that this is the cellphone as the label puts "the cellphone" in quotation marks.

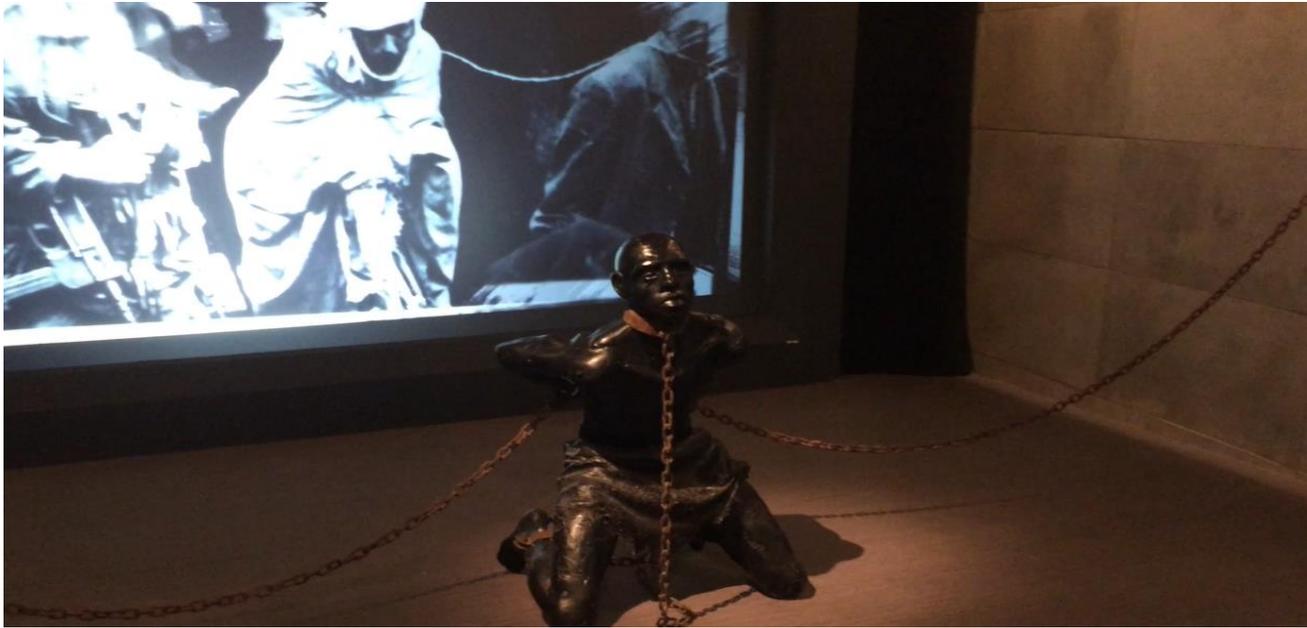
The remaining two glass cases present exemplary ammunition used on civilians by coup perpetrator soldiers, and finally, the Medic's Barrel that holds *Şahadet Şerbeti* (Elixir of Martyrdom). The saying is that drinking the elixir of martyrdom (once dedication to becoming a martyr in the name of God) roots back to the Ottoman period, as the medics on the battlefields provided a sweet liquor made out of holy water and honey to ease the pains of severely wounded soldiers. The barrel displayed in the museum is a replica, included in the display thematically due to its function of commemorating the martyrs.

The next step in the museum is the Heed of Martyrdom, a well-advertised yet unavailable hall in the display. The aim was to utilize hologram and ghost screen technologies for an immersive experience of the violence. Yet, the museum staff and curation team noted in the interviews that the room did not play as well as planned. However, the technology was later utilized in the final installment of the July 15 museums, Ankara museum.



banana republic, global south, geopolitics, ethnic conflict, orientalism, massacre and so on. The video includes different individuals repeating these words in a loop. The museum staff stated that this segment is designed to introduce the public to the broader conceptual and historical context of which the July 15 coup is a part.

The following installation on display is the *Colonial Exploitation*. The museum explains that the "first instances of coups in the world had been introduced during the 15th-century colonial invasions by Europeans." The wall provides information on the history of the discovery of the Americas, the Native American genocide, the north-Atlantic slave trade, and the millions of people enslaved and killed under colonial violence. Right across the corridor, on the opposing wall, the installation titled *Hidden Truths*, in which the anti-Western sentiment throughout the second part of the museum is most evident, "a civilization that cut sixty thousand fingers." The wall briefly introduced the long-term effects of colonial violence and the calamities it caused. Right next to the *Hidden Truths* is a slight indentation displaying a statute of an adult black male in shackles. The statue is carved in black marble, representing the victims of the north-Atlantic slave trade and enslaved peoples.



*Figure 13: Statu of an Enslaved Person*

Behind the statute, a screen plays a slide show of photographs of enslaved people in black and white. After the statute, the visitors arrive at a hall in two segments. On the right, there are three touchscreen tables. The screens show the world map and a menu display where visitors can choose the options of coups or colonialism. On the colonialism map, visitors can pick from the menu of colonial power. When you click one, the geographies and countries colonized show up, with brief information on each, the dates and consequences of colonial occupation. On the coup map, the world map fills with points representing a coup in history, with details of the events unfolding. However, the information provided by the maps is asymmetric, meaning British colonialism and Pinochet's rule, for instance, include a variety of anecdotes. In contrast, Dutch colonial rule, for instance, only includes a couple of pictures of enslaved people and only the regions that have been colonized.

Across the touchscreens, the following installation is the wall of people "who stood against colonialism and exploitation." The wall represents historical figures around the globe who embark on anti-colonial struggles. The wall has the names of Simon Bolivar from Venezuela, Abdulhamid II and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk from Turkey, Mukhtar Ömer from Libia, Mahatma Gandhi from India, Che Guevara from Cuba, Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. From the United States, Aliya İzzetbegovic from Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Nelson Mandela from South Africa. The wall also has a cautionary note below the names and pictures of the said names, stating, "The names on the wall are listed chronologically regarding their anti-colonial struggles." Museum staff stated that they wanted to add the note since they have received minor complaints about why, for instance, the name of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk is not on the top.



Figure 14: Wall of People who Stood against Exploitation and Injustice

Moving behind the wall are three indentations; one includes a museum display, and the other displays the Neo-Ottoman architectural designs on the museum windows. The first provides information regarding the weaponry used in colonial campaigns and how they progressed. The next one is titled, *A Call for Coups*, which includes information on coups in Egypt in 2013, Algeria in 1991, Iran in 1953, Chile in 1971, and Gana in 1966.

In a morbid slideshow, a screen showcases the photograph and information on the touchscreens, featuring scenes from coup-related violence.

The next indentation, titled "*Blow to the Will of the People*," playing on the words blow and coup, are synonyms in Turkish (darbe). It recounts the history of the coups in Turkey in 1960, 1971, 1980, 1997, and June 15, 2016.

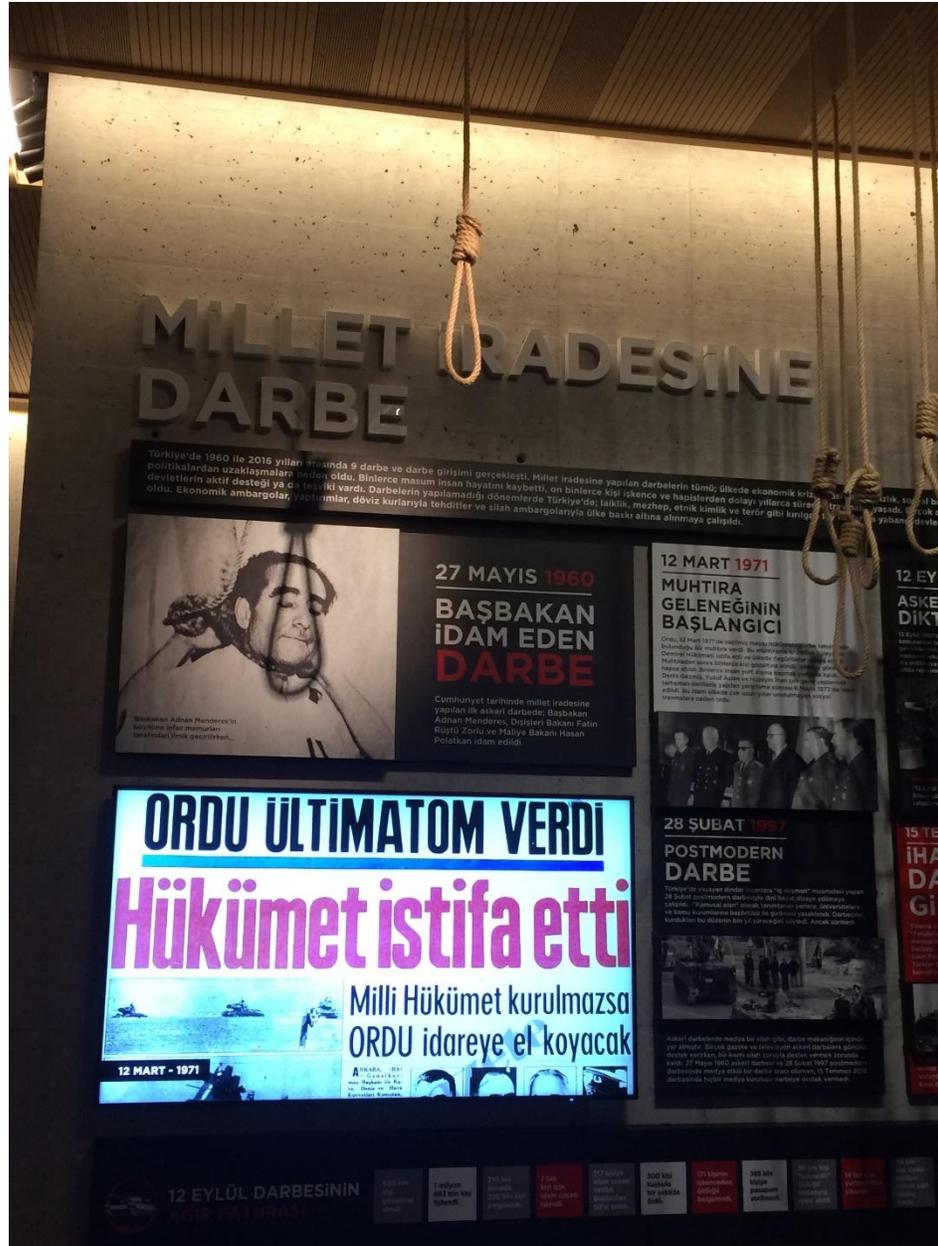


Figure 15: Wall of Turkish Coup D'etats

The installation has hanging man's ropes drop below from the ceiling, and the first of them was put in front of the lighting, which cast a shadow on Adnan Menderes' picture, the prime minister and the president of the right-wing Democrat Party until the 1960 coup and his subsequent execution. The shadow cast on the picture frames the face of Menderes, representing his demise under the military junta.

The third and last indentation only has a quotation from Mevlana, "those who do not learn their lesson from the past will turn into a lesson themselves in the future," as the museum legitimizes its existence through the importance of remembering for the future.

The three indentations face the most extensive installation in the display, the wall of the how-to of colonial rule and the occupation. It is titled the *Mechanics of Colonialism* and has four subheadings, *Colonize*, *Establish the Colonial Rule*, *Transformation into Imperialism*, and *Transition to Modern Colonialism*. The *Modern Colonialism* segment links the histories of the colonial occupation and coups as the perpetrator of coup d'etats depicted as motivated by colonial aspirations of unspecified external enemies. The installation is over-articulate and over-symbolizes, near to kitsch in describing mechanisms of colonial rule. A hand reaches out from the wall as a puppeteer, the strings from the fingers to tie to military officials, religious figures (A small puppet of the Pope-Esque figurine dangles from the strings), a martial court with high-ranking officers, another hand reaches out to a pile of money holding a hand-grenade with a dollar sign on it, a syringe injecting conflict to the soil, and so on.



*Figure 16:: Installation of External Enemy Figures*

The conceptual universe of the display makes a grand gesture of hand to tie every instance under the framework of coup d'etats, stretching the concept to almost indistinguishable from any other form of colonial intervention. However, this is the only instance in July 15 museums that make the historical and conceptual linkage between the memory of the night and colonial violence. The Ankara museum briefly touches upon

the history of coups, yet, the display does not make the extensive and detailed gesture as in the İstanbul museum.



*Figure 17: Installation of Military Junta*

### **3.2. Kahramankazan Martyrs of July 15 and Democracy Museum**

Kahramankazan museum narrates the story of Kazan, a municipality of Ankara, located fifty kilometers north of the city center. The small town is where the Akıncı Air Base played a pivotal role in the July 15 coup attempt, as the fighter jets took off and terrorized civilians from this air base. It was also the area where many coup attempters, either in the base or captured after the night nearby as they were trying to flee. After Sela, many people gathered in front of the main gates of the military base, and eight/nine people were martyred due to the soldiers' fire. Kahramankazan museum is one of the earliest July 15 museums that opened its gates to the public and commemorated the eight Kazanian killed on the night.

The name of Kazan changed after the night's event to Kahramankazan (Kahraman meaning hero) in a similar vein to the Republic's history of honoring cities that faced great turmoil and defense during the war, such as Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, after the World War I. Before the museum, the spatial politics of the AKP government was already there to mythifying the events of the night and the sacrifices of the people in terms of a Second Independence War. President Erdoğan and others in his government often and publically stated the importance and severity of the night's events.

As a result, the display of Kahramankazan museum is a combination of commemorating martyrs, the town itself, and the unity of the state and President Erdoğan. The museum is located just at the skirts of the town and towards the Akıncı Base. Before entering the museum, museum-goers see an enormous cauldron (Kazan means cauldron). The town was named after Kazan/cauldron, famous for its copper cauldrons.

Upon entering, on the left wall, there are five stone reliefs. Four depict the coups of 1960, 1971, 1980, and 1997. The fifth depicts President Erdoğan's speech at the United Nations declaring that "the world is bigger than the five," referencing the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (China, France, UK, USA, and Russia) in 2013. On the right cross to the reliefs is a statue of a farmer on a triangular field, looking towards the museum's doors.



*Figure 18: Kahramankazan Martyrs of July 15 and Democracy Museum – Caldron*



*Figure 19: Fresk of 1960 Coup*



*Figure 20: Fresk of 1971 Military Intervention*



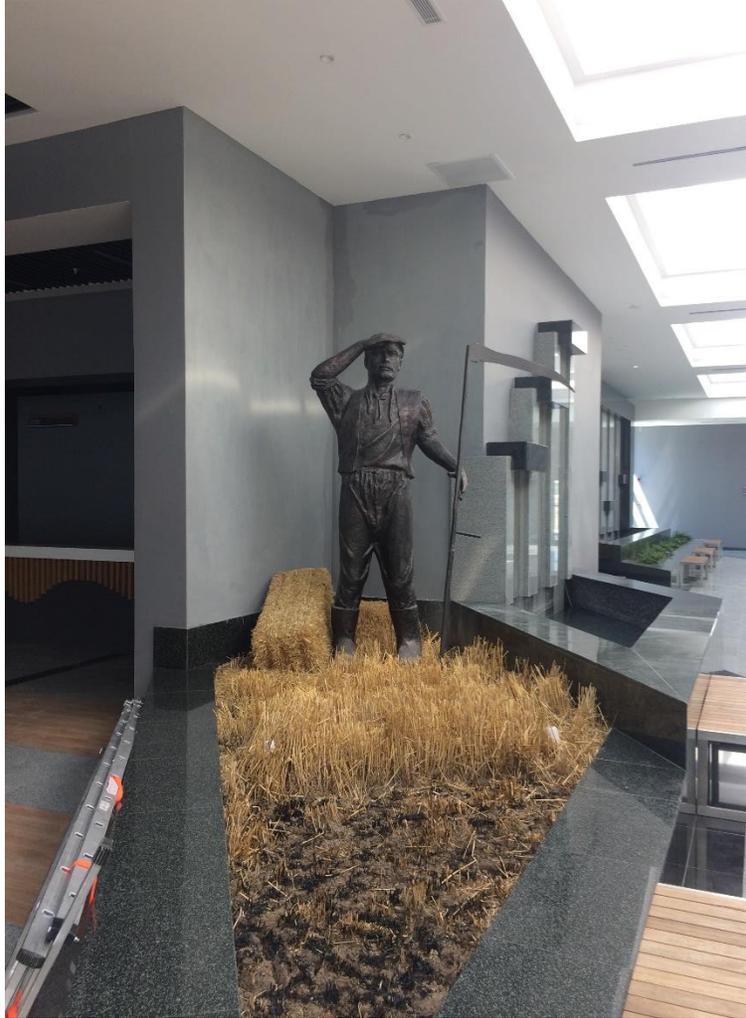
*Figure 21: Fresk of 1980 Coup*



*Figure 22: Fresk of 28 February Post-modern Coup*



*Figure 23: Fresk of President Erdoğan*



*Figure 24: Monument of Farmer Bitik*

The statue belongs to the Hicabi Bitik, the mukhtar of the Bitik neighborhood. He owns small agricultural land near the Akıncı Air Base and the runway. He burnt the crops and tires in his possession to create smoke to prevent fighter jets from landing and taking off from the air base. Passing through Bitik's statute, the first half of the Kahramankazan Museum, The display extensively archives the funeral displays using photographs from the ceremony of the nine martyrs, which President Erdoğan attended. The curation team designed the first hall's walls to reflect a soundwave as the news of what was happening traveled around Turkey via media sources. The display uses the sounds of clocks ticking

as the traumatic event, the inevitable, is approaching. Tick-tocks are followed by intensified audio recordings of violence and mayhem using the sound shower technique. The chaotic sounds end when the museum-goers reach the exhibition segment commemorating the Kazanian Martyrs. Personal items of the deceased were donated by the families of the martyrs and displayed by the nine human-size monoliths, each engraved with their names, including their pictures and personal items (clothes, shoes, the receipts they had in their pockets when they were killed).

The motif of soundwave continues to the second and final hall, as the wave is now engraved on the right side of the hall and displays newspaper articles, pictures of the coup attempt, and footage of the violence. The final item in the installation is a cauldron mounted on the wall from the end of the exhibition. There is a mirror when the museum-goers walk towards it at the bottom of the cauldron. The Kahramankazan museum narrates the story of the heroism of a small, silent town that becomes something more than its former self. The display is designed to reflect the change; as Kazan became the Kahramankazan, the museum-goers see themselves as the story's protagonist.

### **3.3. Ankara July 15 Democracy Museum**

The final addition to the July 15 Museums is the Ankara July 15 Democracy Museum, on Alparslan Türkeş Street, no:18. The museum is right across the street from Millet Mosque on the campus of the Presidential Palace.

On the night of July 15, the palace was one of the targets of coup attempters, and the fire opened from the fighter jets in the early hours of the morning of July 16, witnessing civilian casualties. The museum is the only entirely thematic museum among the July 15 museums, as the display poses no items from the coup attempt and no personal

belongings of the perished. It is a trauma site museum; regarding attacks on the palace complex, the ex-nova museum marks the site as a space of collective trauma. Since the indexicality of the museum's site is only linked to the night's events through the bombing of the palace, and no actual imprint is available on the site regarding the attempt, the final installment in the July 15 Museumification is an exhibition of full-blown thematic and sensory wonder.

Ankara July 15 Museum, located in the last remaining land of the Atatürk Orman Çiftliği, invites visitors to a garden that is now the star of the latest political controversy regarding AKP's spatial politics: The land is already disrupted by the construction of the museum, but also remaining green space will be transformed into a recreational area, or Millet Garden, which is a practice that is evident in the Memory July 15 Museum and nearby Millet Bahçesi. As of this day, the path that takes museum-goers to the entrance is partly finished and still under construction (as the museum itself, which is under construction until late December 2022 or early January 2023). Following the small path, the visitors arrive at 251 steps to descend underground as the museum's gigantic entrance hovers on visitors' heads meters above. Because of its proximity to the palace, the museum is heavily guarded by police forces on both sides of Alparslan Türkeş street and at its entrance. After the checkpoint, visitors can enter the only free-roaming area of the museum, the *Hall of Coups in Turkey and Around the Globe*. The hall was designed to portray the starry night sky flickering above the visitors. The hall is 659 square meters, and under the giant ceiling, there are five information igloos. These domes of information provide the museum-goer with glimpses of coups in Turkey, Haşhaşi assassination and plotting methods, and examples of coups around the globe. Once

again, the July 15 museums provide museum-goers with keywords and the conceptual universe that the museum-goer is about to embark on.

It is the only museum among the July 15 Museums that do not allow museum-goers to move freely within the space. The final museum's exhibition is a literal memory lane compared to other examples. The museum-goers have to wait in the first hall until tour guides declare the second hall is available. Thereafter, the tour begins with the museum staff's strict guidance.

The second hall, *A Threat of Bullet*, is 197 square meters and shaped like a cube, with each of the four walls made of enormous screens. The hall screens a four-minute-long video of the early hours of the coup attempt. Museum executives explained in the interview for the fieldwork that the second hall serves the purpose of illuminating what happened that night until 10 pm when the fighter jets started to get hold of the airspace of the capital Ankara and İstanbul. The controversy surrounding the kidnapping of Hulusi Akar, former Chief of the Military, now the Ministry of Defense, and the early movements of the FETÖ, needed to be incorporated into the master narrative. The museum provides some answers to questions regarding what happened during the kidnapping. The video utilizes all four walls, providing the museum-goer with an intense experience of visually striking images and the sound shower technique, in which the audio source is not detectable by the museum-goers ears. The immersive experience is highlighted by the score, similar to action-movie soundtrack beats; the video takes visitors starting from how the late night schedule of the coup attempt had to be taken into earlier hours, Hulusi Akar's re-enactment denying the coup perpetrators' sinister offer of the position of power in the post-coup setting, with him putting down his punch

on a surface of the table. The video also commemorates the first person killed in the coup attempt—Bülent Aydın, one of the military guards of the Chief of Turkish Land Forces, reported later on as the first martyr of the night. The video ends with a bullet cutting through the screens diagonally, with a trail made of fire, ergo the name of the hall, while the museum staff moves the crowd into the third hall.

The second hall opens to a corridor, the exhibition's third destination. The corridor/hall is titled Plunge into the Dark. The corridor is extremely loud with the gun firing and mayhem, accompanied by a dark ally, replicas of fighter jets and helicopters on the ceiling, and projections of jets flying and hovering on visitors. The corridor is designed to reflect the experience of people who got out of the safety of their houses and resisted the coup attempt. Designed as a dark ally and ominous danger lingering in the air, the visitors reach the end of the corridor to a giant screen that shows the then Bosphorus, now July 15 Martyrs Bridge, which is accompanied by the hologram of the coup perpetrator soldiers, who blocked the bridge with tanks and heavy weaponry. The most ambient of all July 15 museums, the Ankara museum, was curated to inform the public and share the night's violence via prosthetic trauma (Landsberg 2004) to remember. However, as a thematic museum, it must craft and execute a compelling and respectable narrative of the night's events. After the first hall, the museum directly takes visitors to share an experience.

The fourth hall, *The Longest Night* is the second most significant stop in the exhibition; the hall occupies 1420 square meters. As the main dramatic attraction and centerpiece in the narration of violence, the hall is nothing but impressive. During fieldwork, I had the chance to experience the hall in a near-empty state and during the commemorations on

July 15, 2022. Both experiences were quite different but equally impressive as the enormous hall is covered with enormous screens from wall to wall, while the middle of the hall has a rectangular hollow, which has half of a tank, directly targeting the main screen, which shows a fifteen-minute-long video of the most brutal moments of the night. When the hall is empty, the sheer size of the construction is imposing as the visuals, and sound effects assault the museum-goers. When it is crowded, the experience of walking through the corridor, the hologram soldiers, and the fourth hall intensifies the experience as museum-goers have to walk with a crowded number in a dark and unsafe environment. The video depicts the night's violence in quick cuts, accompanied by the fire burning in the right and left walls of the hall, tanks moving, and absolute chaos reigning the visuals. The video continues with not only the violence caused by coup perpetrators but also the victory of the people as they overcome the soldiers on the Bosphorus Bridge, Kızılay Square (now named July 15 Martyrs Kızılay Square). Finally, people gathered around President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as his plane landed at the now-closed Atatürk Airport in İstanbul. The tempo of the visuals calms down as Erdoğan speak to the people, the victors of the night; a bright light blooms at the center of the hollow and race through all walls before the hall turns crimson red with Turkish Flags.

The fifth hall is the start of the calmer segment of the museum tour, as the 361-square-meter hall is dedicated to a documentary form; people re-tell their account of the night. The hall is titled the Witness Hall, and apart from the video, which consists of the testimonies of 68 individuals who witnessed the night's events unfold. The hall has loggias with touchscreens that shows a map of Turkey and the sites that experience

violence and pins for the 251 martyr and their locations of death. The sixth hall is the smallest in the exhibition, only 20 square meters, and is dedicated to the Sela, which also constitutes the hall's name, in honor of who perished that night, and also the importance of the Sela itself for the events of the night (as people marched on the streets after the start of Sela from all mosques in Turkey).

The *Sela Hall* opens to the *Hall of Martyrs*; people who lost their lives are commemorated by 251 human-size labels, including their photographs, names, age, and where they were martyred. The hall is 666 square meters and decagon-shaped; one of the walls is the entrance, and the room's exit is in the direction of one o'clock. Upon exiting the seventh hall, the eighth and the last one require a short walk into a widening corridor that leads to the biggest of the halls in the museum, at 4.283 square meters, the *Hall of Democracy Watches*. Upon entering the hall, the museum-goer first sees the roots of a giant fake plastic plane tree, accompanied by the hyper-realistic wax sculptures of people with Turkish flags, coming from all ages and different backgrounds, sitting or standing on the grass and branches of the tree. The plane tree has been picked to symbolize the nation and the people, as the tree is vast, and its roots reach deep into the earth. Ninety wax sculptures are modeled just like in the case of Ulucanlar, based on and inspired by real people but purely fictional. The vast plane tree is positioned in the center of the sphere-shaped hall and under the museum's glass dome. On the side is a stairway that climbs towards the dome, with photographs of the people who later become veterans of the coup attempt. The dome has similar motifs to the Martyrdom monument in Memory July 15 Museum, İstanbul, as the individual branches form a unity under the sky,

symbolizing the people and the nation, and martyrs passing from this world, inside the dome, to other, the sky.



*Figure 25: July 15 Democracy Museum*

## CHAPTER IV

### **COLLECTIVE TRAUMA AND POPULIST MEMORY: AGONISTIC MEMORY SPACES**

AKP, as a populist movement, went through several phases during its 22 years long rule. One of the constituent elements of its populist discourse is reliance on collective memory and trauma to mobilize masses following the contextual framework the political temporality requires. One of the prominent mobilization points for the movement was establishing itself as the new engine that would overhaul the problems of "Old Turkey" and carry the country into a new prosperous era. From the start, the AKP's political strategy involved instrumentalization and, at times, weaponization of the past to derive legitimacy for the political actions it wants undertake while utilizing the past to strengthen its counter-hegemonic discourse against Old Turkey and its institutions by capitalizing on the secular–religious divide which provided many right-wing populist movements with a ground for distinction among us vs. them (Mardin, 1973; Özbudun, 2013; Bakiner, 2018). Conceptualizing already existing hostilities in terms of cleavages, AKP put forward a Manichean discourse on who the people are and how and in what ways the real people are deprived of their sovereignty.

Why is AKP excessively reliant on mnemonic strategies? The answer rests in the AKP's aspirations to represent itself as the embodiment of the rightful constituent power that can reconfigure the state and the country in the image of its rightful sovereign: The people. The historically repressed true people vs. elite is a bountiful ground for deriving

legitimacy and pitting itself as the agonistic power against the historical injustice provided the AKP government to mobilize its voters and other segments of society that are usually distancing themselves from such movement together to counter a common enemy: The establishment. Yet the same movement also needs to establish an ideological ground that should also encompass the position that once the real people have become the establishment itself.

The initial phase of the AKP government's rule in terms of populist politics was primarily concerned with a counter-hegemonic assault on the establishment. The establishment is excessively framed around the coup d'etats and the perpetrators of the sporadic political violence. This framing peaked towards the 2010 referendum as one of the constitutional changes included was the dismissal of the "temporary 15th amendment," which protected the perpetrators of the 12th of September 1980 coup d'etat and provided immunity for the military junta in legal procedures. The referendum took place on the 12th of September 2010, the thirtieth anniversary of the coup, and the constitutional changes passed, with 57% of voters saying yes in the election. The initial phase of populist memory politics in this regard deals with forming alliances among the different segment population to counter the hegemonic memory in Turkey by constructing a merger point for different mnemonic communities through shared victimization under military coups.

The second phase in the populist memory politics of AKP consists of answering the question of what form of memory regime is required when the anti-establishment force becomes the establishment. Such establishment requires a temporality that echoes collective traumas of the past in new forms while staying true to its roots. In this phase

memory regime of the AKP continues to revolve around the trauma of coup d'etats. At the same time, the perpetrator as a figure changed from military juntas to terrorism, and anti-establishment sentiment towards the elite shifted to enemies within as an act of coup d'etat now can be carried out by non-military sources such as the Gülen Order, which framed in terms of its act of forming a parallel state organization. The status quo and corrupt elite, once the foci of AKP's memory regime, now shift to the anti-people and traitors, a source of threat to the sovereign people in the form of enemies within. The second phase is also characterized by defining the people in excessively political Islamist terms, which is a stark difference from the initial phase in which AKP, a conservative Islamist political movement, shared its status as victims of coups with other political affiliations. In the second phase, political Islam becomes the primary constituent elements of defining the people as victors against the anti-people.

In this regard, AKP's memory regime represents a consistent narration of coups as the overarching framework while how the coups and victims of political violence can be remembered changes following the requirements of the temporality they are speaking to. The agonistic memory spaces of Ulucanlar Prison Museum and July 15 museums play a pivotal role in constructing the memory regime by building public spaces that appropriate specific periods and traumatic events and significant urban spaces as trauma sites, marking these places as zones of past trauma to reconfigure the symbolic meaning of the sites they are established and the histories they represent.

By museumification of the trauma sites as spaces of memory, AKP's populist memory regime crafts an ideational politics that derives legitimacy from different normative orders that intersect in these museums. These sites open new spaces for temporal

political subjectivities. On the one hand, museum displays operate on an ideological level by narrating shared pasts and traumatic events, crafting new mnemonic communities while codifying the space as a public space for these newly established political identities. Each trauma museum is either an extension of broader urban transformation as in the case of Uluçanlar and Ulus district and the Presidential Palace, which was already established to appropriate a former public space as Erdoğan's house of power and post-coup attempt of July 15, reconfigured to become semi-public space with additions of Millet Library, Millet Camii, July 15 Museum and new plans for another Millet Garden to the Palace Campus or museumification paved way to open up a new public space not limited to the museum building but extending it with Martyrs Makam and another Millet Garden as in the case of Memory July 15 Museum in İstanbul.

#### **4.1. Why Truth-Reconciliation?**

Trauma site museums became one of the signature mnemonic strategies of post-authoritarian societies as their function often dictates truth reconciliation. Representation of past political violence in terms of collective trauma, some period or event marked by violence and grief opens up possibilities for new political subjectivities as to how to reconcile with the said event or period directly linked with the temporal political setting by how you remember the object of mnemonic practices becomes a vital part of the newly established political subjectivities. However, remembering the traumatic event via trauma site museums is a double-edged sword since the collectives often engage with the said event on their terms. The result is that instrumentalization of historical reconciliation with past political violence to constitute a new truth regime that revolves around the collective trauma of coups and the victory of a democratic future. The

populist memory regime of AKP established a temporal dimension for collective trauma that can prefiguratively invoke a more democratic future. Spatial and historical re-appropriation of these trauma sites as memory spaces simultaneously remembers and forgets specific dimensions practical to the temporal politics and provides a sense of democratization of past and future while legitimating the more autocratic tendencies of the populist AKP government.

In this regard, truth reconciliation processes such as monumentalization and memorialization can indeed become political projects of depoliticization at the hands of populist memory regimes, as in the case of the AKP government by the declaration of new beginnings, which put an end to already existing and contested memories in temporality and frame them as the "past" (Khelevnyuk 2021). The discourse on the New Turkey pit against the Old Turkey provides an excellent example of such artificial disruption in time constructed to serve as a threshold that can mobilize us vs. them discourse around the contested nature of the period/event that is memorialized. The gallows behind bars in Ulucanlar Prison Museum and the transition from victims to victors in July 15 Museums provide breaking points with the past by constituting a divergence from the normalcy of how things were to a better, more democratic future. Yet in its memory regime, AKP's mnemonic strategies remain antagonistic through and through, so much so the museums provide public spaces that are codified not with reconciliation but instead establishing everlasting trauma zones that criminalize the past political violence to construct a populist identity that can utilize us vs. them distinction in different forms, formerly as the establishment in Ulucunlar Prison Museum and now as anti-people or traitors in July 15 museums.

## **4.2. Trauma and Sovereign Time**

In the process in which collective memory is an integral element of the constitution of identity, collective traumas hold a significant place. Traumatic events or series of events mark a point in collective history where the linear history (or official history or, more precisely, in Jenny Edkins' theorization, "the sovereign time") is disrupted. This disruption opens up a space for the emergence of new political subjectivities that, one way or the other, must incorporate the disruptive event and its trauma. At the same time, framing the event as trauma also opens up a new space for the sovereign to integrate the trauma into its discourse, reaffirming and re-constituting a new sovereign time (Edkins 2013).

In this regard, trauma and the forms of remembering that are derivative of it are as follows:

As opposed to psychological or physical trauma, which involves a wound and the experience of great emotional anguish by an individual, cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people who have achieved some degree of cohesion. In this sense, the trauma need not necessarily be felt by everyone in a group or have been directly experienced by any or all. While it may be necessary to establish some event or occurrence as the significant "cause," its traumatic meaning must be established and accepted, a process that requires time, mediation, and representation. A cultural trauma must be understood, explained, and coherent through public reflection and discourse. Here, in modern societies, mass-mediated representations play a decisive role (Eyerman 2004)

As Eyerman noted, the meaning that collectives can attribute to an event or events as trauma requires their mediation and representation in a narrative that must find an appropriate place in formulating the collective identity. In this sense, "traumatic status is attributed to real or imagined phenomena, not because of their actual harmfulness or their objective abruptness, but because these phenomena are believed to have abruptly, and harmfully, affected collective identity" (Alexander 2004). At this point, it is crucial to conceptualize the collective trauma in terms of its socially constructed, mediated and represented status. Collective trauma is not a self-evident phenomenon that just the event itself can mark. The collective must constitute the traumatic attributes of an event in how the very collective in question represents how and in what ways it is affected. With this absence of collective trauma as a clear-cut static category that can be quantifiable, the disruption of the sovereign time by an event produces the open space that the collective's members – including the sovereign itself- can author the trauma framework. In regard the identity formation and trauma's relationship, trauma presents either a basis for national identities to build upon through monuments and architecture (Koselleck 2002; Boyer 1996) or the construction of narratives that establish systems of symbols and strategies of remembering (Kilby 2007; Osiel 1997; Maier 1993; Antze 2016).

### **4.3. Why Trauma-site Museums?**

Tonny Bennet's theoretical framework to understand museums as cultural, disciplinary, and social institutions has impacted the field of museology since the 1990s. The "concept of the exhibitionary complex was proposed as a means of thinking through a series of transformations in the relations between the practices of the exhibition and the modalities of power that accompanied the development of the public museum." (Bennet 10). Bennet, like Hooper-Greenhill, was after a theory of museums, a public space in

vain of its authoritative and disciplinary role. Yet, his conceptualization moves away from Foucault's heterotopic framework, which is prevalent in the new museology literature. Critiques of heterotopic reading of space point that understanding the museum as a disciplinary institution and also a space consist of often contradictory spatial organization within presents a top-down understanding of public museums, in which these sites often engage and transform different subjectivities and are changed by the very subjectivities they aim to transform. However, there is a theoretical move in Bennet's work from exhibitionary complex to governmental assemblages as the latter incorporates the intricate network and complicated relations of space, objects, exhibitions, and socio-political context they emerged while maintaining the governmentality of museum complexes, providing us with the in what ways the museum can become an apparatus. By framing the spatial organization of museums as assemblages, the concept opens up a nuanced understanding of museums since, as an assemblage, museums can still become apparatuses. Yet, they are not bound to fulfill their functions as an instrument of governmental power. With this theoretical move, Bennet expands the scope and field of possible influence out of the exhibitionary complex. Its governmental and disciplinary power confines the museum's borders and operates within broader socio-political contexts.

In the case of AKP's memory museums, Bennet's exhibitionary complex/governmental assemblages illuminate the network of collective memory, the intertextuality of sites regarding their memorialization of coups and the overall history of the political violence, and the spatial configuration of trauma sites in an assemblage of space, memory, history, and individual subjectivities. However, AKP's politics of museumification forms a

relationship within the collective memory and space based on the subjugation of memory and space to strictly political and extremely contemporary debates. Hence, museumification incorporates an instrumentalization of governmental assemblages to subvert and abuse the museum format.

#### **4.4. Populism and Collective Memory Nexus in Ulucanlar Museum**

Ulucanlar Prison Museum is a trauma-site museum and a dark tourism destination. Dark tourism, or thanato-tourism, is an ancient practice where people visit sites marked by devastating political events such as wars, torture, and natural disasters. They are zones that witnessed calamities and brutal events, which today transformed into public spaces via museumification, monumentalization, and commemorative practices. Like collective memory, collective trauma can be passed through generations via remembering, commemoration, and truth reconciliation practices. However, this trauma is not self-evident, as its collective and intergenerational nature requires transfer mechanisms among individuals and generations. In this regard, the collective trauma must be framed and re-constructed to testify against the passing of time in the future. Trauma site museums benefit from the indexicality of the space and establish a link between the memory of the violence and the museum-goer. The exhibitions within trauma-site museums rest on the testimony of the space and the authenticity of the experience (Violi). Indexicality "maintains a real spatial contiguity with the trauma itself" (Violi, 2012), as the museum-goers witness the site where the violence occurred and connect with the items residing in the display appropriate to the memory of the past and provide a direct link to it.

Trauma-site museums exhibit the collective trauma or frame events in terms of trauma in a twofold sense: The first step is to establish an interpersonal link between the museum-goer and the traumatic event. Everyday life items from inmates, letters to their families, and hyper-realistic sculptures presented in daily activities in Ulucanlar Prison Museum are all mnemonic strategies that build a common ground between the museum-goer and the memory of inmates on the site. The display excessively relies on the humanity of inmates, independent of the political context that brought them into incarceration.

Personal items increase the sense of authenticity and enhance the museum's authority (Thurston, 2012:12). As an exhibitionary complex, the museum's utilization of authenticity also increases its authority on what can be remembered since indexicality to trauma is the selling point of the master-narrative. The second step is establishing a link between the time/space-specific violence in the trauma site and the history of political violence in a given context, in this case, Turkey's record with military juntas.

#### **4.5. Homogeneity and Victimhood**

Mustafa Pehlivanoğlu "as Necdet was found guilty of the shooting of another coffee house and sentenced to the death penalty, and just like Necdet's friends, his friends that were on trial for the same crime had also escaped the prison; although Mustafa had escaped, he got caught again before the 1980 coup" (From Prison to Ulucanlar, 42).

Ulucanlar Prison Museum display attempts to draw a parallel between the different memories of the political violence that the inmates have experienced, as can be seen above quotation. As a museum that aims to narrate a history of 81 years, vast numbers of inmates, and different circumstances that brought each individual to the prison, Ulucanlar Prison utilizes this vastness and diversity of inmates regarding their political backgrounds. Utilization is carried out by flattening these narratives into mere victimhood,

which allows a form of memorialization that is only possible by a master – narrative that constitutes a victim-perpetuator axiom. The narrative decision is no surprise as a trauma site, and a memorial museum, the Ulucanlar Museum's narrative relies on its constructed political context. The museumification of Ulucanlar is a case of populist memory politics. The history and memory of the political violence are narrated to narrate and intertextually linked with the contemporary political debates at its establishment. The museum curated a public space in which the display recounts the past political violence in terms of the victim-perpetuator axiom, which aligns with populism's Manichean distinction of us vs. them, people vs. establishment, and or elites.

The homogeneous representation of the inmates is a deliberate narrative device, but how can the museum achieve such homogeneity? The answer is flattening history and memory into categories that can be linked to each other. The memory politics reigns in Ulucanlar Museum relies on the populism's us vs. them, people vs. establishment distinctions adaptation into the victim-perpetuator axiom, which is exceptionally prevalent in collective memory studies. Enzo Traverso notes that the conflation of memory, history, and trauma often results in mnemonic practices representing individuals' histories as victims, constructing political subjectivities that can only be remembered via their victimhood (Traverso 2019). Overall, victimhood as a political representation may lead to depoliticization, as the victim can only exist in this framework concerning their perpetrator.

As a right-wing populist government, the 20 years of AKP witnessed relentless and detailed re-formulation of coups, so much so that its populist narrative of people vs. elites and anti-establishment rhetoric has a long history of establishing a memory regime

that is inseparable from history and memory of coup d'etats. Populism-collective memory nexus plays a vital role in forming a chain of equivalence among different segments of society, utilizing the memory of the past to draw an internal frontier among the populus in terms of us. AKP's populism utilizes the existing cleavages in Turkish society to establish itself as a party of the periphery, the underdog, and, subsequently, the real people. The establishment, or the Kemalist elites, is framed as the oppressor of the real people, the legitimate source of power to push the extreme majoritarian understanding of a democratic polity. In this vision under the AKP, the people are understood as unified masses instead of the heterogenous body of citizens and plurality. Collective memory under the populist rhetoric becomes an effective tool for drawing the internal frontier. As both exclusionary and inclusionary politics, populism relies on us-and-them division. However, contrary to other forms of politics that draw upon such division, like nationalism, the boundaries between them and us are fluid in populism. This means the populist is the real people, or we demonize some segments of the society as an enemy but still leave space for joining forces or finding the righteous way, as the populist style often excessively moralizes the distinctions it draws within the same population. The construction of collective memory through the victimization under the military coups provides an excellent rhetorical tool to catch-all aspirations of AKP's populist politics and simultaneously constitution of an enemy who can belong to the anti-people. Ulucanlar museum is an actual example of a populist project that can repurpose the history and memory of past traumatic events for contemporary politics as "the journey of the Ulucanlar Prison's museumification illustrates how a collective past can be instrumentalized for populist politics, on a quest for the extension of power, and silencing pluralism in the society to create a unilinear trajectory for the future" (Uğur

Çınar-Altınok, 18). Within the context of the 2010 referendum for constitutional change, removing protection on the coup perpetrators of the 1980 coup d'etat was one of the highlights of the electoral campaign AKP. The debate was pretty simple considering the complex histories of coups and the changes proposed to the constitution: Progress of Status-quo. The debate was framed in a populist fashion, whether you are on the side of progress or the status quo. In 2010, the fusion of the AKP and the state and eradicating institutional boundaries were not as deep as post-July 15 since institutional settings still provided checks and balances within the system. The progressive gesture of populist movements, framing a plebiscitary and extreme majoritarian democracy in terms of "the people unbound," is a rhetorical device used to legitimize the growing power of the executive branch.

Ulucanlar Prison Museum, with its victim-perpetuator axiom fused with people vs. establishment, put forward a narrative of highly depoliticized former inmates, stripped from the socio-political context each people found themselves in prison.

Museumification of the former prison stripped the site from the plurality of lived experiences, as the case in point of erasure of Women's Ward, and memories of female inmates, which were experienced in a highly gendered manner, are not part of the display. The pathemic and spatial interventions to the site to enhance the experience of museum-going results in the reproduction of the space without the authentic experience of the complicated site in its times of prison. The equity in violence, for instance, is one of the most prominent features of the Ulucanlar's narrative in the museum, that coup perpetrator hanged people "one from the left, one from the right," emphasized in written material from the museum and audio tour guide one can use during their visit. Yet the

same museum, using the same methods in the representation of the victims, as the museum placed one poem from Necip Fazıl and one from Nazım Hikmet Ran as they are representative of right and left-wing figures constantly remind museum-goers that the vast symmetry in victimhood under the military juntas. This is derivative of the catch-all rhetoric of populist AKP in terms of the conditions of memorialization depending upon the chain of equivalence formed by victimhood. This identity disperses political segments of society that can find common ground. The Ulucanlar Prison Museum utilizes the critique of the dire conditions of inmates within the prison in the parenthesis of victimhood. However, the display's enclosure of time and political violence with gallow behind bars frees itself from commenting on the conditions of prisons and autocratic politics of incarceration that are rampant in the era of AKP. The museum display frames the end of the death penalty as a victory of democracy, while the anti-democratic practices of incarceration were monumentalized as something of the past. Museumification in the Ulucanlar appropriate the memory of violence to narrate a contemporary story of democratization. Yet, when the museum opened its doors before its conclusion to showcase the display before the referendum, the problematic state of prisons in Turkey had not changed. Ulucanlar museum critiques and criminalizes old Turkey by showcasing the violent history of political executions but putting the gallow behind bars. However, the narrative of inescapable victimhood overshadows the more optimistic conclusion of the display that symbolizes the end of the old Turkey. This is because museumification firmly establishes the site as a dark tourism destination and trauma-site museum without reconciliation with the past. To be a politically relevant and excessively instrumentalized space, the Ulucanlar museum must remain unresolved or a collective trauma that can be resolved via people under the flagship of AKP. The spatial

appropriation of the trauma site directly curates a political statement on the vastness of the injustice derivative of the corrupt elites that have held the real people hostage for many years.

#### **4.6. July 15 Museums and Construction of Trauma**

July 15 coup attempts have become the focal point of AKP's politics after the 2016 summer. On July 20, 2016, the National Security Council declared a state of emergency for three months. The three-month state of emergency was extended seven more times and lasted for two years up until 2018 summer. Under the state of emergency, the people of Turkey underwent a constitutional referendum to change the country's regime type from parliamentary democracy to a presidential system, in which the executive branch, the president's office, is provided with extreme powers.

Turkey also witnessed mass purges in state organizations, universities, private and state-owned businesses, and most importantly, the military and judiciary, in which the Gülen Order's members are the most numerous. The politics of decree laws characterize the state of an emergency period. Although the law state that the state of emergency decree laws can only be issued on topics related to counter-terrorism/coup attempt, the two-year period witnessed various ways of utilization of decree laws, even regulating day-time savings. According to the Report of the State of Emergency Decrees Commission, between 2016 and 2018, 131.922 cases were issued by decree laws, 125.678 public servants were removed from their offices or positions, 270 students were expelled from the education system, 2.761 institutions and organizations/firms have been closed down, and 3.213 soldiers were exonerated from the military. Post-coup Turkey witnessed a civil death reminiscent of the 1980s coup as the social and political order grew

authoritarian. Under these conditions, the 2017's referendum's selling point for the new presidential system was that the extremely powerful executive would be efficient and sweep for counter-terrorism. The post-coup politics and the memory of the night and violence were the cornerstones of the AKP's electoral campaign and legitimization of the proposed regime's extremities. Many commentators criticized the proposed presidential system as cementing the state of emergency rule, providing the president with exceptional political powers. In this context president's office, the ministry of culture, and several foundations immediately started to plan the museumification of the memory of July 15.

However, these museums were constructed not in isolation, as the government moved forward to constitute a commemorative spectacle of the memory of July 15. It was immediately declared a national holiday and framed as the July 15 Epic (15 Temmuz Destanı), with thousands of 15 Temmuz Destanı statues placed around every city in the country. AKP undertake an ambitious project, re-naming bridges, parks, and squares around the country as of July 15, names of the martyrs of the night, and erasure of every street and park name in Ankara that incorporates words Fetullah and Gülen, as the head of the terrorist organization FETÖ is the number one undesirable in the post-coup Turkey. Seven streets had the word Gülen in their names in Ankara, and in the autumn of 2016, they were re-named Vatan, Hilal, Alsancak, Anayurt, Bayrak, Diriliş ve Kayı (\*).

The president's office includes July 15 as one of the main headings of activities, providing a detailed account of the coup attempt for the Turkish and international public. One hundred twenty-four paged long booklet titled July 15 Coup Attempt and Victory of

the People booklet, available for download in eleven languages, and two other booklets, "Ten Questions to Understand July 15 Coup Attempt and Fethullah Terror Organization" and "July 15 Coup Attempt and Parallel State Structure". SETA, an NGO close to the government, launched its research projects and academic studies under the "July 15 Studies". In the immediate aftermath of the coup attempt, the government started to produce knowledge on July 15 to establish an official narrative of treason and victory for democracy, to solidify further its claims for a need for a strong presidential system, to fight and re-claim the state organization from the deep state or in official terms, the parallel state structure. The excessive knowledge production aiming to capture the narrative on the night, incorporated with commemorative practices surrounding the new national holiday July 15, established an enclosure of the event in time to represent and memorialize it as a victory for democracy.

The mnemonic strategies surrounding July 15 are based on a relatively straightforward narrative: Democracy vs. Coup. AKP's memory politics, as evident in the case of Ulucanlar and the electoral politics of the 2010 referendum, was already heavily reliant upon the coups and anti-establishment discourse that personified in the military and republican institutions. The July 15 coup attempt provided a political environment where anti-tutelage, anti-establishment populist rhetoric to find its footing as the nation and state merged in action to stop the coup and protect the will of the people. However, the memory politics and knowledge production regarding the coup attempt also provided an excellent environment for the government to re-write its close ties with the Gülen Order, as none of the published material includes the very close relationship between the AKP and the FETÖ. The relationship had been shattered when the Turkish National Information Agency's chief, Hakan Fidan, was summoned by the court for misconduct.

This marked the shattering of the relationship and was framed as "the first instance of the illegitimate attempt of taking over the legitimately elected government by parallel state structure"(Ten Questions to Understand July 15 Coup Attempt and Fettulah Terror Organization).

The same source cites the Gezi Protests of June 2013 as one of the instances of the FETÖ organization corrupting and transforming an environmental protest into an illegitimate take-over of the government. FETÖ became the face of the antagonist and presented a personified anti-democratic figure instead of the ephemeral establishment on which the right-wing populist politics of AKP previously constituted itself.

The memory politics of July 15 is an excellent example of amnesia by remembering the sets of policies and memorialization processes in which the AKP and Gülen Order's close relations not only ever mentioned, but the FETÖ become terrorists, and anti-people par excellence as the mnemonic strategies only allows them to be remembered as an anti-people, anti-state and by the merit of the coup attempt, anti-democracy. The gross human rights violations of the aftermath of July 15 were all incorporated into the official time and collective memory as instances of the democratic struggle against terrorism.

In this context, the July 15 Museums emerged immediately planned and organized in the aftermath of the coup attempt to "never forget" and memorialize it as an instance of democratic solidarity. There are five July 15 memory museums in Turkey, one in İstanbul, the Memory July 15 museum, and one in Ankara; Kahramankazan Museum of Martyrs of July 15 and Democracy both opened their doors in 2019; Ankara July 15 Democracy Museum in 2021 Gaziantep July 15 Museum in 2017, and Çorum July 15 Museum in July 2022.

The memory politics surrounding July 15 are dedicated to framing the event regarding trauma and victory through the memory of martyrs. While AKP continues its populist rhetoric of people vs. enemy, compared to Ulucanlar Prison Museum, emphasis on martyrdom changes how the people are defined. The former politics collective trauma memorialization in Ulucanlar Museum targets a faceless mass of people, diverse yet sharing the same victimhood under the tutelage of military rule. The narrative-wise construction of homogeneity and victimhood marks Ulucanlar's memory politics framework. In the case of July 15, memory politics, the unification of the people, leader, and the state are complete; it is a unity in action ready to save its state and democracy on a whim.

The memorialization of the event derives its emotional core from the sacrifices of the heroic civilians, military personnel, and law enforcement, who all put their lives on the line that night. The martyrdom and the martyrs play the central role in identifying the people through Islamic symbolism and religious commemorative practices surrounding the concept. July 15, museums, in this sense, narrate a memory embodied in the people's victory. Nevertheless, the people as victors require remembrance of the violence incorporated into the public's collective memory to stem the engines of the mnemonic narrative of July 15. People as Victors require no solidification or conceptual and narrative stretching to accompany various names under victimhood. The victims of political violence are not passive masses who are subjugated to political violence. Still, instead, civilians turned heroes, martyrs. However, People as Victors requires a constituent other to formulate itself in AKP's increasingly more authoritarian implementation of populist rhetoric narrative-wise. The collective trauma of the coup

attempt provides this constitution as each museum carries the mission of never forgetting.

Memory July 15 Museum contextualizes the martyrs and people's victory in the vast history of colonial violence, positioning the night not as mere local turmoil but into the grand scheme of global political order. The trauma in this context needed to be present or remembered, as the Kahramankazan Museum with the mirrored cauldron suggests; the people are the guarantee that such occurrences never happen in the future. Ankara Museum display is an excellent example of people constituted by collective trauma as both the trauma of the coup attempt, the memory and sacrifices of martyrs, and the subsequent victory have been immortalized and played on a loop within the walls of the museum.

July 15 Museums, in the same vein, provide spatial organizations that keep the memory of the coup d'etat alive and traumatic as possible. The three museums included in this research operate at different trauma-site re-configuration levels. Kahramankazan, the modest of the three museums, narrates the story of Kazan, a small town disrupted by the July 15; it commemorates Kazanians' victims of the night while reminding the responsibility of the everyday ordinary citizens when the state, the leader, and the motherland are under threat. Mere victimhood as a narrative device transformed into the layperson's heroic deeds and the martyrs' sacrifice. Although the story is epic, the victory was only possible because of the sacrifices of the martyrs. What can be remembered in the July 15 memory regime circles around the notions of enmity and treason, marking the day as a victory with a high cost.

Ankara Museum is the only pg 13 trauma site among the July 15 museums. The most immersive among the July 15 museums, the experience of violence and the memory of victory are extremely vivid in the museum halls. Ankara Museum also represents the politics of collective trauma in its most bare form. Compared to other museums in this research, Ankara Museum's articulation of its political agenda is the most limited. In an interview with museum officials, they stated that one needs to write a good story to be able to sell that same story. As a purely thematic museum, it moves away from the object-oriented configuration of trauma-site museums dependent upon the authenticity to an almost real-life re-enactment of the night, purely limiting the thematic story within the confines of the prosthetic experience of what it is like to be on the streets of Ankara, Kahramankazan, and İstanbul on the night July 15. It utilizes immersive experience to represent the violence of the coup while giving no context of previous events that led to July 15 or the aftermath of the coup attempt. The coup attempt remains isolated from the historical context as a pure experience of violence. As a governmental assemblage, the museum-goer and the halls form a network of trauma – witnessing incorporates the trauma site and the nationwide experience of the night into a constellation that encloses the night as a source of collective trauma. Same network formation is evident in the Kahramankazan as well, the Akıncı Airbase and heroism of the Kazan people incorporated in the cauldron with a mirror, extending the night's trauma to museum-goer, not as only a mere spectator but as a witness and the part of the agency in which trauma-site, the memory, and the individual brought together never to forget.

Memory July 15 museum remains the most comprehensive exhibitionary complex as it utilizes the post-colonial critique to construct a story of the demise of sovereign people

under foreign colonizer powers or terrorist organizations through the violent upheaval of democratic and legitimate institutions and, more importantly, the right to self-determination. The museum constructs a sovereign time by positioning July 15 in equivalency with the past coups in Turkey. However, the museum display further extends the memory of coups by establishing another layer of equivalency with the history of colonial violence and racism.

The memory politics of AKP surrounding the anti-coup discourse draws parallels between instances of demised sovereignty between July 15 and the colonization of India. The conceptual symmetry is only possible by flattening each history into a reasonably simple dichotomy of usurpers and sovereigns, making each instance of the coup and colonial violence a formulaic occurrence, in which the differences between the realities are eroded to fit in a narratological device and a political statement.

AKP's strategies of museumification as a populist memory politics incorporate the usurpers vs. sovereign people dichotomy as a narratological apparatus and expand it to the appropriation of collective memory and space by establishing twofold governmental assemblages within the museum and the space these museums occupy.

The master narrative utilizes the museum's most problematic aspects of biopolitical history writing. The dispersed, unique, and time/space-specific occurrences of political violence, thanatopolitics, and forms of oppression flattened and de-historicized to fit a formula (Traverso 2021). The narratological decisions dictate how to contextualize collective traumas and memories. As a result, the narrative depoliticizes each instance by establishing a grandeur narrative suitable for contemporary politics. The critique of

Western-centrism and orientalism by the post-colonial framework in the İstanbul museum is formulated to re-establish the victors of July 15 as the legitimate sovereign. More importantly, it establishes an idea of self through collective trauma. The formula for narrating the idea of sovereign people as the populist self also aligns the victim-perpetuator axiom with the usurpers and sovereign dichotomy. The alignment is only possible via eroding the lines between memory and history, conflating each instance referenced within the museum to construct a symmetry that dictates a scaling of events. As a result, the museumification of collective trauma formulates an assemblage of memory, history, and subjectivity of individuals traumatized or prosthetically engaging with a trauma that does not belong to self but to others. As a mnemonic assemblage, AKP's memory museums construct an identity for peoplehood, reaffirming the nation's might through shared hardships and victories. Antagonistic museumification also turns the museum as governmental assemblage theorization on its head, utilizing the more comprehensive and detailed configuration of space and narrative to formulate an idea of self not limited to the exhibition but moving beyond its border to the top-down instrumentalization of and political formulation of silencing the rich possibilities opens up in trauma-site and memory museums, instead of more poly-vocal narratology within the museum.

Museumification of trauma sites also aligns with AKP's broader spatial politics of appropriation and gentrification of space in its ideal of social, urban configuration (Batuman 2018). Ankara museum is located in one of the only remaining lands of Atatürk Orman Çiftliği on Beştepe/Ankara. The decision to locate the presidential palace on the AOC was already a politically motivated decision to the appropriation of a

symbolically important landmark. More importantly, the palace is built on a public space, one of the few green spaces in Ankara. After the coup attempt, by the merit of being a trauma site, an ex-nova trauma site museum was established, not precisely on the spot of violence. However, a more parasitic fashion in a nearby location, formerly a public space, transformed into a presidential palace that re-transformed into a public space while heavily securitized. The museumification of politicized space establishes a broader assemblage of space and memory by opening the conflicted spaces as a museum. Museumification gives an upper hand to processes of appropriation of the space. Specifically, in the AKP period, trauma and memory museums re-configured these spaces in broader spatial politics. The old republican center of Ankara, Ulus, has undergone significant change in attempts to gentrify the region in more Islamic terms under AKP and right-wing municipalities. Ulucanlar Museum adds to this project with a political statement on the trauma site and the memories within the site. Istanbul Museum is located directly near the bridge, where one of the most violent occurrences of the coup attempt took place. The museum not only makes a political statement on the inside of its walls but by repurposing the nearby areas as Millet Garden, the museum is also located at a point where the newly repurposed garden serves the people, and the museum mainly attracts visitors among the people who spend time in the Nakkastepe Millet Garden. Except for Kahramankazan, each memory museum constructs spatial organizations that are reaching beyond their museum function and expanding the narratological mission of the museums symbolically to nearby spaces.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

This research studied the AKP government's memory regime as a case of populist memory politics through the instrumentalization of collective trauma -both authentic and fabricated- in memory spaces of the Ulucanlar Prison Museum, Memory July 15 Museum (İstanbul), July 15 Democracy Museum (Ankara), and Kahramankazan Martyrs of July and Democracy Museum (Ankara). This dissertation contributes to the memory politics literature by theorizing the AKP government's memory politics in terms of populist memory regimes to understand the detailed yet ideological attention given to the museumification and fabrication of collective trauma by establishing trauma-site museums. The aim is to understand the constituent role of narrating the past regarding collective trauma in establishing a populist understanding of the people that can be instrumentalized for different temporalities in contemporary Turkish politics.

As a populist movement, the AKP government's memory regime has been shaping a mnemonic community throughout its rule in a populist formulation. Many aspects of this regime have been changing. The memory regime of the AKP government is shaped by a robust Manichean logic in which the population is divided into people vs. elites or people vs. enemies in an increasingly moralistic fashion. The true people, the rightful sovereign, are either pit against an abstracted elite, providers and sustainers of the status quo of oppression, or traitors who will act in impunity to overthrow the rightfully elected

government and the will of the people. The simple moralization of specific segments of society as good vs. evil or people vs. elite provided a retelling of the history of political violence in its early phases in terms of victim vs. perpetrator and later phase in the form of people vs. traitors. Overall the populist memory regime provides the AKP government to instrumentalize particular events in terms of collective trauma to constitute a mnemonic community. The AKP government's populist memory regime utilizes different mnemonic strategies to construct peoplehood that depends upon the people vs. enemies distinction to weaponize the past for contributing to the drawing an internal frontier within the society and mobilize masses against its anti-establishment in its early phase and suppress political dissent in its later phases. The populist memory regime instrumentalizes several approaches to collective memory by shifting between the cosmopolitan and antagonistic modes of remembering (Bull & Hansen) by appealing to the truth reconciliation's normative higher ground and premise of democratization while maintaining its Manichean rhetoric. The result is an abstract mnemonic community following its populist premise that is simultaneously inclusionary and exclusionary. While it is inclusionary since belonging to the community depends upon the alignment with the populist discourse's representation of the real people, it is exclusionary in the sense that the borders of the people are drawn specifically to exclude certain segments of society. Trauma-site museums erected under the AKP's rule precisely follow a victim-perpetuator axiom under populism in their narration of the past. AKP's populist memory regime constructs itself in a master-narrative in which the memories of 1960, 1971, 1980, 1998 and 2016 coups, military interventions and coup attempts represented the sole oppressor of the real people by stripping citizens from their sovereign right to rule. This particular representation of coups in terms of the people vs.

establishment axiom provided AKP to mobilize segments of the society whose political alignments are quite different. By emphasizing the shared victimhood under military tutelage and, in the case of the July 15 coup attempt, the violence inflicted on people, AKP's populist memory regime constructs a mnemonic community explicitly characterized by its victim status. Being the object of the violence became the only constituent character of the real people under the populist memory regime.

In such a composition, collective trauma becomes the driving force under the populist mobilization as the past political violence becomes the source of identification to different political groups under the narration of victimhood. In this regard, the weaponization of the past manifests itself in framing the memories of the coup d'etats as instants of collective trauma exclusively. Yet this narration excludes any form of transformative aspect for the political subjects since memorializing these events captured the past in designated memory spaces as never-ending trauma zones. The Ulucanlar Prison Museum, which opened its doors in 2010, serves as a weaponization of the past as the museum attracted attention just before the 2010 referendum as a site that promises reconciliation with the political violence of coup d'etats. Instead, the trauma site of Ulucanlar Prison museumified in such a manner in which the what had prison witness is captured in a tokenistic way, displaying the names of important politicians, writers, journalists, activists, and artists from both left and right-wing ideological leanings in compressed and depoliticized representation align with the abstract representation of political violence. Ulucanlar Prison Museum derives its authority from the relationship it forms between the indexicality of the space: The prison site is notorious for the number of inmates and execution of death penalties of critical political

figures throughout the republic's history. However, the authenticity of the violence is depicted in a very sterile and blatant way to produce a homogenous mass of victims. The nuances between the historical and political contexts of the processes that lead execution of political prisoners are erased by the homogenous framing of victimhood and its anti-establishment discourse.

The July 15 museums operate within the framework of the populist memory regime by formulating the mnemonic communities and the frontiers of remembering in populist terms. However, while the formulation of memory politics remains populist, the Manichean distinction between the population changes its content from its anti-establishment formulation to people vs. enemies in the form of the terrorist organization of Gülenists. The change in the content is no mere shift in the discursive practices as the AKP government's rule reached its 15<sup>th</sup> year when the July 15 coup attempt took place. July 15, museums follow a similar form of representation, with Ulucanlar Prison Museum trying to mimic the indexicality of the memory space by marking particular places as trauma sites. The displays in each museum represent the traumatic aspects of the coup attempt while framing the event as a democratic victory. The people who died due to the coup attempt are given the status of martyrs. The mnemonic community the museums are trying to establish can only align themselves with either martyrs or the real people who took on the streets on the night of the coup attempt. July 15 museums represent and narrate the night's events vividly and in excruciating details, as the displays present the video recordings of the bombs and killings in a loop. July 15 museums are all ex-novo trauma museums, meaning, unlike the Ulucanlar example, the site itself has no relation to the displayed collective traumas.

Furthermore, the indexicality they claim stretches the trauma-site museum and memorial format to an extent that museum displays either fabricate the relationship between the site itself or the historical context they are framed into. Memory July 15 museum, for instance, equates the July 15 coup attempt with the previous coup d'etats in Turkey, coups worldwide, and the history of colonialism and slavery. Each historical event lacks context and represents the oppression of real people's sovereignty. Within this context, the AKP government frames the people in terms of victors, in which the thank to the sacrifices of martyrs, the real people manage to overcome the coup attempt, which is a democratic act. AKP's populist memory politics seeks to construct a notion of peoplehood that can be mobilized by collective trauma by either fabricating or instrumentalizing forms of political violence from the past and transforming memory spaces as zones of never-ending trauma that the public can experience and identify with the victims as victims and nothing more. The normative order of democratization and truth reconciliation provides the necessary ideological ground, and the act of museumification derives legitimacy from the sheer authority of museums as spaces of knowledge.

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