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Gökhan Şensönmez

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Politics of remembering the enemy: prisoner narratives of the 1980 military coup

Gökhan Şensönmez

Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey

ABSTRACT

This article examines 64 autobiographical narratives written by erstwhile political prisoners who were forced to cohabitate with their adversaries in post-1980 coup military prisons of Turkey in the mixing-for-peace (kariştırt-barıştır) program. Tracing these narratives published between 1988 and 2019, it argues that there are three recurrent versions of remembering the enemy: ‘the unjust’ is utilized in the identity reformulation of right-wing Ülkücü militants whereas ‘the miserable fascist’ reaffirmed the leftists’ superior self-image vis-à-vis the right-wingers. While these two are predominantly entrenched in far-right and far-left memory camps, remembering the enemy as ‘the fellow victim’ provides a case of multidirectional memory as it was expressed by both left-wing and right-wing political figures to narrativize their break from radicalism and to whitewash their responsibility in the past violence. This tripartite division in remembering the enemy suggests the addition of a radical/centrist axis to the conventional left/right axis for a more comprehensive understanding of post-coup memory in Turkey.

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Introduction

The brave Turkish Army has taught a lesson to both the [political] right and the left and forbade you to quarrel with each other. Outside, the people are united. Now is the time to make peace. We will make you reconcile just like a father reconciles his children. If there is anyone who disagrees, take one step forward!1

In his memoir, Fikri Günay, once a leftist prisoner at the Mamak Military Prison, remembers the officer’s speech announcing the treatment program called ‘mixing-for-peace’ (kariştırt-barıştır) to the political prisoners. Launched a few days after the 1980 military coup in Turkey, the program envisaged forcing members of left-wing and right-wing groups, who were
at daggers drawn throughout the second half of the 1970s, to cohabit in the same wards and cells. After the announcement, leftist revolutionaries moved towards a line of fascist prisoners, and with the officer’s command, they started to hug each other. Comparing it to various forms of physical and mental torture that he experienced, Günay claims that pretending to make peace with the fascists, who he perceived as inferior in several ways, was the toughest to endure. On the other side, Mehmet Öztepe, a member of the far-right, nationalist Ülkücü Movement, reflects on the impossibility of making peace with the leftists: ‘Do they recognize God, the Holy Book, the prophet? Do they know patriotism? How can I hug those who shout, “I am a communist?”’

However, when the vice-president of the Nationalist Action Party (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi – MHP) in the late-1970s Yaşar Okuyan recalled his experience of mixing-for-peace, he drew a different picture. Okuyan asserted that he did not perceive people as left-wingers or right-wingers because they were subjected to the same tyranny in prison. He added, “The people who were firing bullets at each other became friends there, got to know each other, and acknowledged each other as human beings.” Similarly, Mahmut Esat Güven, a leftist prisoner, emphasized similarities between the leftists and the right-wingers by arguing that both sides were victimized by an anonymous third party.

The first two accounts were underlining the tormenting effects of the mixing-for-peace program and the impossibility of reconciling with each other, but the latter two claim that the treatment program was an indispensable opportunity for reconciliation. Interestingly, Günay and Öztepe preserved their radical political positions on the far-left and the far-right, while Okuyan and Güven continued their political career in center parties in the post-coup era. This brief comparison evinces the limitations of perceiving the left and the right as monolithic blocks in analyzing the 1980 coup’s memory and asks for a new analytical layer between centrist and radical actors of the post-coup era.

Scholarly attempts to capture the post-coup memory politics are delimited by the lack of this layer and have reached conflicting conclusions. On one hand, those who study radical political actors observed that mnemonic communities in Turkey compose a ‘hyper-polarized memory field.” On the other, those who studied centrist political actors observed cooperation between old enemies and monitored attempts to ‘forge a shared memory.” These studies partially capture a political dynamic that directs one toward polarization and sustaining enmity, and the other toward cooperation and reconciliation.

To analyze this dynamic, this article focuses on the ways of remembering the enemy in 64 autobiographical narratives of the mixing-for-peace program written by right-wingers and left-wingers of the pre-coup era and
published between 1988 and 2019. My findings suggest that, although there were shifting nuances, forgetfulness, and the eventual return of themes and terminologies, three distinct versions of remembering the cohabitant enemy are recurrently employed to substantiate particular identity claims. Remembering the enemy as ‘the unjust’ is utilized in the identity reformulation of Ülkücü militants, whereas ‘the miserable fascist’ restored the leftists’ superior self-image vis-à-vis the right-wingers. While these two are predominantly entrenched in far-right and far-left memory camps, remembering the enemy as ‘the fellow victim’ presented a multidirectional dynamic, as it was borrowed across left-wing and right-wing politicians to narrativize their break from radicalism and to whitewash their involvement to the past violent conflict. Considering this third version, I will suggest the addition of the radical/centrist axis to the conventional left/right axis in analyzing the 1980 coup’s mnemonic corpus. Overall, the findings of this article will demonstrate that this new layer of complexity is necessary for explaining the source of discrepancy concerning the matter of reconciliation as well as the production of alternate memory versions.

Multidirectional memory and narrating the enemy

As Günay-Erkol and Şenol-Sert argued, ‘there are different versions of memories of the military past, which form a plurality and heterogeneity of stories in Turkey.’ Such plurality often invokes an understanding of memory as a battleground that hosts contested efforts to be ‘recognized as the legitimate and true one,’ or ‘to create, define, or impose a common memory.’ For Michael Rothberg, however, this approach considers collective memory ‘as a zero-sum struggle over scarce resources.’ Instead, he proposed an approach based on considering collective memory with multidirectional dynamism where distinct memory groups coexist with the potential to enhance each other through ‘ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing.’ In addition to the historical and political aspects of memory, multidirectional memory offers a perspective that encompasses forms of interaction between coexisting memories beyond competing.

As part of this approach, Rothberg rejected ‘the notion that identities and memories are pure and authentic.’ From his perspective, the relationship between memory and identity is not a straightforward and deterministic one. On the contrary, the complexity of this relationship refers to the larger scholarly discussion of presentism within memory studies. This scholarship reflects the tension between conservatively reproduced memory narratives that substantiate identities and manifold influences of the present that continuously reshape how the past is remembered.

Of course, this tension extends to the practice of telling stories of one’s life. Autobiographies may appear as pure and authentic representations of
individual lives, yet they are products of negotiating reflections of personal past with socially desirable identities in the present. In Ricoeur’s words, ‘the epistemological status of autobiography’ refers to a ‘fusion between history and fiction.’ In compliance with multidirectional memory, people meticulously borrow elements and frames from elsewhere to give meaning to their life stories. While some elements and frames might enhance multiple memory groups, some may remain particular to a single group.

It is also important to note that narrating the experience of the post-1980 coup prisons was a difficult task with regard to the wounding memories of shock, torture, and numerous other forms of degradation. In this vein, as Propp suggested, narrating certain characters with specific functions attached to them stabilizes the overall narrative. Among these characters of a narrative, ‘the enemy’ holds a special political significance. A wide range of theorists including Carl Schmitt, Georg Simmel, and Samuel Huntington, perceived the enemy as an essential category for the constitution of political identities. Moving one step further, Rodney Barker argued that ‘the creation of identity involves not simply the identification of opposites but their narration and cultivation.’ The way the enemy is constructed in a narrative discloses narrators’ fragilities alongside perceptions of what is threatening their collective identity.

Following this theoretical nexus, I will discuss the conditions and limitations of mixing-for-peace, which brought those prisoners together, and then proceed to analyze ways in which the enemy is remembered in prison narratives, alongside political identity functions attached to them in the post-coup era.

The 1980 military coup and the mixing-for-peace program

The escalation of street violence between the Ülkücüs and various leftist factions in Turkey was one of the defining characteristics of the late 1970s. Numerous armed assaults by leftists and right-wingers against each other, assassinations of politicians, journalists, academics, police officers and chiefs, public prosecutors, and trade union leaders, the May Day massacre in 1977, and pogroms in Anatolian towns contributed to the morbidity of the political atmosphere. With the declaration of martial law at the end of 1978 in 12 provinces and its eventual expansion to seven others, political figures throughout Turkey called for the Turkish Armed Forces to stop the violence, but to no avail. According to the Turkish Parliament’s report in 2012, there were 32,893 recorded acts of ‘anarchy and terror,’ between December 26, 1978, and September 11, 1980. With 9,090 incidents recorded as armed assault and 6,365 incidents recorded as usage of explosives, roughly half of these 32,893 were acts of violence.
Alongside an economic crisis and political deadlock, the rising violence became a source of discontent for the military. After patiently waiting for the right moment to arrive, the military succeeded in a full-scale takeover on September 12, 1980. In contrast to the previous coup d’état of 1960, which set the stage for the growth of diverse political actors, the 1980 military coup was a coup de grâce to every political organization as it swiftly swept the bellicose actors of the past decade. With the coup, the military regime brought a salvo of drastic measures to reinforce the weakened state authority. The top-ranking generals formed the National Security Council (Millî Güvenlik Konseyi), and declared an immediate countrywide curfew, detaining leaders of political parties, shutting labor unions down, and eventually closing all political parties and prohibiting any political activity in 1981. Those involved in the organized political struggle were subjected to a massive wave of incarceration. The junta filled prisons with leaders and militant activists from the left and the right. According to the numbers published in the military regime’s propaganda book, on May 12, 1981, 26,828 people charged with ideological offenses were in prison.29

After the coup, leftist and right-wing political prisoners were forced to live in the same wards and cells under the mixing-for-peace treatment program.30 However, the scope of mixing-for-peace could not be expanded to every prison due to the imbalance in the prisoner population. Prisoners from the right-wing were all male, hence the mixing-for-peace could not be operationalized in female sections of the prisons which were populated by leftist women. Furthermore, the number of right-wing prisoners was considerably lower than the leftists which limited the implementation of mixing-for-peace to several prisons where right-wingers were kept. In that regard, the Mamak Military Prison was outstanding for the number of right-wing prisoners since a military court presided over the trial of the MHP and Ülkücü Associations in the same barracks. Outlasting a few short-lived experiments in other prisons, mixing-for-peace was sustained at the Mamak Military Prison for seven years. Therefore, the memory of the mixing-for-peace was mostly focused on, but not exclusive to, the Mamak Military Prison.

For the military regime, mixing-for-peace at Mamak was an instrument to showcase how the 1980 coup swiftly cured ‘the ideological malady’ within Turkish society. The propaganda focused on the theatrical display of tranquility in mixed wards to highlight that hostile political groups made peace and were now living in harmony under military supervision.31 From the perspective of prisoners, the junta aimed to squeeze them between the prison administration and their adversaries by counterposing hostile groups. For them, the experience of mixing-for-peace was about dwelling in the tense environment of congested wards and cells, where a simple quarrel could turn into a deadly fight.
Against this strategy that was crushing them in between the violence of prison administration and the hostility of the opposite group, the prisoners developed a meticulous counterstrategy of division. Bunk beds, tables, chairs, plates, forks, and spoons were allocated by calculating the population of both sides. Using what they could to create borders, every centimeter of walking space was demarcated to ensure minimum contact. Despite all these efforts to prevent mixing, years spent in the same space inevitably exposed inmates’ lives to each other. These expositions turned into explorations of the enemy, and explorations later appeared in autobiographical narratives with specific identity functions attached to them.

**Remembering the enemy as ‘the miserable fascist’**

Anti-fascism was a ubiquitous characteristic among numerous leftist organizations of the 1970s. It not only formed the basis for the popularization and the self-legitimization of the left but also became a goal in itself along with the fetishization of armed struggle. The 1971 coup-by-memorandum pruned the radical branches of the left, especially by killing their charismatic leaders and imprisoning many others. However, with the legacy left behind by ‘martyr’ revolutionaries leftist organizations were re-established after the public amnesty in 1974 and grew larger and more violent than their predecessors. When they returned to the political arena, they faced the Ülkücü Movement, which strengthened its presence as an organized force. In the second half of the 1970s, both sides battled over the control of streets, neighborhoods, university campuses, and dormitories to restrict each other’s influence. Despite the Ülkücüs being the major force in the anti-communist struggle, the leftists did not perceive them as the only face of fascism. The notion of the fascist enemy extended, on one hand, to the entirety of the state mechanism, and on the other, to the rival leftist organizations with the label of ‘social fascist.’

The 1980 coup signifies a rupture and a crushing defeat for the anti-fascist struggle of the leftists. From the perspective of the left, after they were defeated and fascism reached its final form, the state no longer needed its Ülkücü minions against the revolutionaries. While punishing the Ülkücüs alongside the leftists, the state asserted the rhetoric of equality between these two sides. For the leftists, however, these ‘minions’ in no sense could be held equal to the leftists who dared to rise against the fascist state. Accordingly, continuous employment of the enemy as ‘the miserable fascist’ is a salient feature of the leftist prison narratives. In this continuity, particular aspects of this version reappear years apart not only to denote inferior aspects of the cohabitant Ülkücüs but also as a source of relief and entertainment in narrating the horrible prison conditions.
Indeed, the torturous conditions of military prisons tested the physical and mental limits of prisoners. For the inmates under the mixing-for-peace treatment, the uneasiness was amplified since their cohabitation with the enemy could easily turn into a violent confrontation between two sides. In these conditions, the leftist authors remember their enemy as weaklings who could stand against neither the prison administration nor the leftists. In 2006, Sezai Sarıoğlu boasted about how difficult it was to pick a fight with the Ülkücüs. Even when he took the prayer rug under one of the Ülkücüs, the Ülkücü ran away shouting ‘Allah! Allah!’ In the end, Sarıoğlu could only manage to ignite a brawl by hitting the face of an Ülkücü with a volleyball. In two separate narratives, Muharrem Şarklı in 2013 and Ömer Babacan in 2015 told how the Ülkücüs were sobbing and fainting after beatings, whereas the leftists stood their ground. Also, İbrahim Çelik claimed in 2016 that the right-wingers were afraid of even looking at the leftists. In addition to the condescending attitude of leftists, these accounts also show that rather than whitewashing their pre-coup aggression, the leftists prided upon their strength and dominance over the fascists in prison.

Moreover, the timidity of the right-wing adversary when faced with torture was narrated as a source of amusement. For example, when narrating the Mamak Military Prison’s ignominious solitary cells known as tabutluk (the coffin store) in his 1989 memoir, Oral Çalışlar remembers three Ülkücüs who were thrown into a single coffin. Later, one of them asked permission to go to the toilet. When the soldier ordered him to do it right where he stood, Çalışlar gloated over the misery of the Ülkücü who started to weep in despair. In contrast, the leftists persevered through all this torture and indignation. A very similar narrative appeared in Recep Memişoğlu’s 2018 memoir where he narrates how the ‘important personas’ of the fascists instantly cried after getting slapped by the soldiers. Looking at the scene, Memişoğlu tells that he broke into a fit of laughter. Despite 29 years separating these two narratives, remembering the enemy as a source of amusement continued to hearken back to how indomitable the leftists were in prison.

In addition to being portrayed as timid and weak, the right-wingers were also ridiculed for their servile character. According to the leftists, the Ülkücüs were deriving their power from the state, which eventually left them in a miserable situation. Even then, they were not acting defiantly against the prison administration. On the contrary, the leftists considered the Ülkücüs as spies and collaborators. Fikri Günay’s memory of an informant epitomizes how the Ülkücüs were perceived as dishonorable, even by fellow Ülkücüs. When the leftists found out who the Ülkücü informant in the ward was, they decided to beat him. Before they could act, the leader of the Ülkücüs in that ward convinced them to punish the informant
In the end, the informant was beaten by his Ülkücü fellows far worse than the leftists had intended.41 In his 1989 account, Sinan Oza employed an aggressive tone in comparison with the mocking attitude prevalent in later publications. However, it shared two main thematic elements with the rest. For Oza, the right-wingers were ‘prone to submission’ in every aspect. This includes their discovery of Islam in prison. In his 1989 memoir, Oza wrote that the Ülkücüs practiced Islam ‘by incessantly reading Quran and performing namaz, only for show purposes.’42 The leftists conceived the Ülkücüs’ new-found religiosity as part of their servile character, but at the same time, insincere or simply funny. In Babacan’s 2015 account, we see a similar depiction, yet this time with a mocking undertone. For Babacan, the Ülkücüs were expecting the divine savior Mahdi to appear and lose themselves in prayer. He claimed that amid all the torture, the Ülkücüs were their only source of entertainment.43

Furthermore, for Oza, the Ülkücüs were in many respects similar to the leftists except for ‘their level of intelligence.’ He blamed the Ülkücüs for their voluntary submission to a fascist organization that cooperates with the ruling classes and the state. In turn, the prison administration used their servile and foolish character to pressure revolutionaries.44 Yet, he did not investigate further as he wrote ‘the fascists were the same old fascists that we know,’45 or calls them ‘petty people who were converted into fascists.’46 Twenty eight years later, the theme of intellectually inferior fascists reappeared in the memoir of İbrahim Çelik. This time, the narrator attached his perspective to a mocking story. He first described how the leftists managed to mold the soaps in the forms of chess pieces and they were increasingly occupied with playing chess in the ward. For Çelik, the Ülkücüs copied this activity, although it took them a month and a half to mold a set of their own. Even then, he said, they were seldom playing it. One day, Çelik witnessed them playing by negating the rules of the game completely. He wrote that he barely held his laughter after watching them play even after one player lost the king.47 Nevertheless, a few leftist accounts diverged from remembering the enemy as ‘the miserable fascist.’ In four accounts published in 1989, 2005, 2007, and 2015, sympathy and respect for the cohabitant enemy were presented in snatches. In these accounts, the authors carefully limited their positive views to a particular person they came to know in prison by providing their full names.48 These people were depicted as exceptional figures in contrast with the rather abstract notion of the fascist enemy that was used to indicate the right-wingers as a whole.

The above-mentioned accounts show that a contemptuous, pitying, and mocking way of narrating the enemy preserved its continuity in the leftist accounts except for rare and limited deviations. In these narratives, the
enemy is remembered almost like a foe that is not worthy of the hostility of the left. This cynical and pitying version of remembering the enemy limited the identity formation of the leftists to a ubiquitously superior self-image. This, however, does not mean that the leftist identity was devoid of any further reform attempts. Although a comprehensive analysis of these attempts is beyond the limitations of this article, it is important to note that the 1980 coup marked the beginning of an incessant search for ‘what went wrong.’ In this search, some interpreted the 1970s as an inevitable journey of the left towards its demise. The heydays of the left were reimagined along with its most controversial incidents of internal struggle such as the 1977 May Day massacre, armed assaults between rival organizations, and public denunciations. In the years after the 1980 military coup, the leftists questioned their factioned state and sought solidarity by reconsidering old rivalries within the left. On the other hand, remembering the Ülkücü enemy as ‘the miserable fascist’ was limited to the function of underlining the left’s self-acclaimed superiority vis-à-vis the right-wingers.

**Remembering the enemy as ‘the unjust’**

With its pro-state, anti-communist character, the Ülkücü Movement was an important factor in the state’s unconventional warfare against communist organizations in the 1970s. The movement was mainly comprised of two major components, the legal-political party, the MHP, and the Ülkücü foundations which had mainly functioned as the party’s unofficial youth branch. On both sides, the leader Alparslan Türkeş had the ultimate authority. The foundations recruited politically active youth who came from a conservative background and further indoctrinated them with anti-communist ideology. In the end, the Ülkücü militant force became an exceptionally organized anti-communist actor in the violent conflicts of the 1970s in Turkey.

The 1980 military coup was conducted by generals employing a similar anti-communist discourse as they immediately turned towards destroying numerous leftist factions. To a large extent, the junta was successful in eradicating the so-called communist threat with a whirlwind of investigations, torture, and executions. By doing so, however, the junta stripped the Ülkücü militants of their self-acclaimed ‘aide of the state’ role. Still, the right-wingers initially welcomed the coup as a belated restoration of the state power. Yet, when the coup sought its legitimacy by claiming the military’s neutral and supra-political status, the right-wingers became the targets of the state’s punitive mechanism. In other words, the coup created an ideological vacuum for the Ülkücü militants not only by removing the anti-communist raison d’être of the movement but also by punishing the self-acclaimed pro-state movement by imprisoning its leaders and militants. In response to this ideological vacuum, the majority of imprisoned right-
wing militants reformulated their identity based on an Islamic view of their relationship with the leftist enemy.

After the coup, the brutal prison regime at military prisons incapacitated the Ülkücü movement’s ability to find a new direction for its followers. The unquestionable leader of the movement and the party, Alparslan Türkeş, was incarcerated and kept apart from the rest, except for the brief and poignant reunions with Ülkücü comrades during court hearings at the Mamak Military Prison. With the party abolished and its leadership circle incarcerated, the organizational capacity of the movement that could have responded to the ideological vacuum was thoroughly destroyed. To top all this off, the right-wingers were forced to cohabitate with their enemies through the mixing-for-peace treatment.

In these circumstances, young militants were left to their own devices in figuring out the reasons for their incarceration and mistreatment by the state. The Ülkücü militants already attached religious meaning to prison before the coup. During the 1970s, prisons were places of systemic indoctrination for the Ülkücü militants where Islamic teachings were a significant part. Combing pedagogical and religious aspects, prisons were referred to as the Madrasah of Joseph (Medrese-i Yusufiye). After the coup, however, these circulating Islamic references were amplified amidst an ideological vacuum, terrible carceral conditions, and relative autonomy from the party leadership. In return, the right-wing militants formulated an ascetic-prisoner identity based on the Islamic term the just (hak). To underline their claim to be ‘defenders of Islam’ rather than ‘defenders of the state against the communists,’ the cohabitant leftist was continuously portrayed as the Islamic counterpart of the just: the unjust (bâttl).

Mixing-for-peace provided a new perspective for Ülkücüs since it allowed them to interact the leftists, perhaps for the first time, in an extra-ideological, mundane, and daily-life capacity. In earlier explorations, Ülkücüs stress that they are worlds apart in terms of religiosity. In 1990, Zihni Açba argued that when he encountered ‘the aberrant leftists,’ he ‘believed in the righteousness of the struggle of faith they were pursuing.’ In the same book, Mehmet Öztepe defined the leftists as ‘the ones shooting bullets at those [Ülkücüs] who try to live according to religion.’ They were different from the Ülkücüs who were united in their pursuit of faith. In 1991, Rahmi Ezik wrote that he perceived faith as the main difference between them and the leftists. The leftists were viewed as discordant even amongst themselves. In 1990 and 1991, the mixing-for-peace program was repeatedly defined as a futile attempt to conjoin ‘the just and the unjust.’ Recalling the enemy as ‘the unjust’ sustained the right-wing militants’ hostility against the leftists while replacing the previous dichotomy between ‘the aides of the state’ and ‘the enemies of the state’ with the Islamic dichotomy of ‘the just and the unjust.’ Accordingly, the Ülkücüs’
struggle with the left was reinterpreted as being only a chapter in the divine struggle between the just and the unjust. For example, Sebahattin Civelek argued that the leftists ‘were only one of the blasphemous fronts against the spreading of the word of God.’ 62 For him, their goal was to save the Muslim-Turk and restore its glorious world order (nizam-ı âlem). All that the coup had captured were some anarchists, who were of a lesser significance in the face of that grandiose goal.

In the later publications, the initial use of this Islamic dichotomy vanished for years. For example, in a collective autobiography published in 2012, there is not a single mention of ‘the just and the unjust’ despite the leftist enemy being continuously depicted as atheist interlopers that disturb the pious Ülkücüs. 63 Similarly, Oğuzhan Cengiz in 2004, and later Recep Küçükizsiz in 2018 remembered the leftists with their disrespectful acts against worship and portray them as sinister attackers at times when the believers defenselessly submitted themselves to God. 64 Nonetheless, this continuing forgetfulness was disrupted in 2016. In two separate autobiographies, Yaşar Toksoy and Selçuk Kutlu not only replicated the Ülkücü militant narrative but also revitalized this dichotomy by referring to their enemy as ‘the unjust’ once again. 65 For example, in Selçuk Kutlu’s words ‘the period before the coup was a small part of the struggle. It was only one of the periods of the continuous struggle between the just and the unjust.’ 66 The reappearance of the term not only documents the narrative’s resilient identity function for Ülkücüs throughout decades but also shows that certain formulations remain dormant in the collective memory to be revitalized after considerable periods.

However, the success of this Islamic identity reformulation in helping right-wing militants’ search for a meaning for their torturous incarceration by the state was by no means compatible with the political currents outside. In varying nuances, these people claimed that they had paid the price of being an Ülkücü by spending their youth in prisons and they demanded their respective status in the party. With few exceptions, these demands did not find any response. 67 As will be discussed in more detail below, the MHP changed its direction towards centrist politics after the 1980 coup. In this new direction, the party wanted to clear away all the jetsam of its involvement in the past struggle. Of course, the ones who chose to construe their identity on that struggle were treated as part of that jetsam. As a consequence, the ideological gap between the party and its imprisoned militants could not be closed. Even today, the old militants sustain their Islamic-prisoner identity by calling themselves ‘yusufiyeliler’ or ‘taşmedreseliler.’ They are perceived as the elderly brothers of the movement. Despite the party being in a de facto coalition with the Islamist Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) after 2016, they are not actively involved in politics. The ones involved in politics,
however, embedded a different template of remembering the enemy, according to the demands of a changing political atmosphere.

**Remembering the enemy as ‘the fellow victim’**

With the 1980 military coup, the junta allegedly opened up a clean slate in Turkey where ideologically-oriented politics were not welcomed. Accordingly, the new electoral system was designed to sustain majority governments and reward catch-all parties without rigid ideologies. Especially with the ten-percent electoral threshold, the parties with a smaller voter base and radical outlook had to find ways to survive in the post-1980 politics in Turkey. The result was a rhetorical shift in Turkish politics with a claim to surpass ideologies. It was first forced by the military but proved its success on a voter base that was weary of the political impasses of the past.

Preserving its veto power, the National Security Council allowed the formation of new parties right before the 1983 general elections. Turgut Özal and his newly formed Motherland Party (Anavatan Partisi – ANAP) managed to pass the military supervision and won successive elections throughout the 1980s. The ANAP settled in the centrist politics with its claim to become ‘a melting pot for four tendencies’: liberalism, social democracy, nationalism, and Islamism. Under the junta’s heavy pressure on politics, Özal carefully designed his rhetoric with pragmatism and focused on the economic restructuring of the country to meet ‘the needs of the men in the street.’ With a booming economy and pressuring military junta, Özal’s success in surpassing the previous tensions ‘tamed’ radical political actors. Consequently, actors of the previous decade felt the necessity to curb their rhetoric due to the overwhelming presence of the military as well as the popular support for non-ideological, pragmatist politics.

After its return to the political area, the MHP also curbed its radical rhetoric and aimed to project a center-party image. Together with the former MHP members dispersed over various parties, the ones who stood with MHP had to realign their discourse to claim their place at the center parties. With this migration towards centrist politics, the right-wing politicians’ past involvement in the violent struggle against the left became a burden. Accordingly, they manifested their break with the past struggle between ideologies through remembering the cohabitant enemy as ‘the fellow victim.’ For Ülkücü politicians, this particular version functioned as a way of asserting their de-ideologized political views, and self-acclaimed clean-handed victim status.

Similar to the militants, the right-wing politicians were frustrated with their ‘unfair’ imprisonment. However, differing from the militants, they interpreted the presence of leftists not as proof of the righteousness of their struggle, but as proof of the meaninglessness and redundancy of the
past violence. By emphasizing discoveries of commonality with the leftists, the right-wing politicians followed a narrative that views the violent struggle of the 1970s as a fight between siblings. The Ülkücü and leftist militants were already coming from similar class backgrounds. Thus both sides were innocent as the ideologically motivated violence was instigated by a concealed third party to weaken the country’s power. Remembering the enemy through the version of the fellow victim continuously underlined these claims and embedded in the extra-ideological, centrist political identity claims of right-wing politicians.

The equal status of victimhood was a way of breaking the ice between the right-wingers and their leftist enemy. In 1988, Muhsin Yazıcıoğlu, the deceased leader of the Great Union Party (Büyük Birlik Partisi – BBP), shared his frustration of not being able to protest the prison administration together with the leftists who were the victims of the same tyranny. In another account published in 2000, Yazıcıoğlu, who was also a trained veterinarian, narrated his medical treatment of a leftist cell-mate who was severely beaten by the soldiers. These empathetic accounts complement a more general manifestation of political realignment by perceiving the leftists as victims of the violent atmosphere. To underline the innocence of the political actors of the left and the right, politicians frequently refer to prisoners as kids and children. For example, when a ‘kid’ got beaten by the soldiers, Yazıcıoğlu shouted from his cell to stop the beating, daring the soldiers to beat him as well. The emphasis on the innocence of the children was also a way to support the idea that essentially there was no difference between the leftists and the right-wingers. Yazıcıoğlu was one of the first accounts that showed empathy towards the cohabitant enemy. Though, what might be considered the archetype of remembering the enemy as ‘the fellow victim,’ is found elsewhere.

The same year, Rıza Müftüoğlu, who continued his political career at the MHP, shared his observations about the leftists. He wrote, ’I saw that people who were brought to Mamak were not very different from us. Most of the detainees were children of poor families.’ Müftüoğlu respected them because of their persistence in their fight to change the system. He continued:

In Mamak, I always thought the leftists gazed at me secretly meaning to say: ‘at least we (the leftists) are here because we fought against these people (and the state). But you (the Ülkücüs) were used like fools.’

While complaining about the ‘used’ status of the Ülkücü prisoners, Müftüoğlu remembered the leftists with sympathy and respect. It can be argued that he even envied the prudence and persistence of the enemy. He mentions wayward leftist militants resisting every command, even refusing to reveal their names to the military officers in the face of consistent beatings. He continued in his survey to find the responsibility for the violence, in turn,
he found none in his Ülkücü comrades. Müftüoğlu concluded: ‘an invisible hand was behind all the murders.’ Müftüoğlu discovered Ülkücüs’ common features with leftists, manifested his respect for the enemy, and removed his and his comrades’ responsibility for the past violence.

In following publications, those who sought a career in politics shared similar narratives in reformulating their previously radical political identities. For example, Mehmet Ekici, who continued his career within the MHP, described his recollections of mixing-for-peace in 2005 as an opportunity to observe the leftists and concluded: ‘There was not anybody of high society at Mamak, whereas we thought that they were from Russia as they thought we were from the U.S. But we were the children of the same geography.’ In 2008, Namık Kemal Zeybek, who served as minister of culture in ANAP governments, recounts his witness to the severe beating of leftist women prisoners and the poem he wrote for them. Similarly, in 2010, Yaşar Okuyan, who moved between several center parties in his post-coup political career, remembers shedding tears after hearing a leftist woman’s screams under torture. For another example, Faik İçmeli, who joined the center-right, True Path Party (Doğru Yol Partisi), narrated his memory of the enemy in 2015 in these words:

I saw this when I shared the same ward with the leftists: these young people were unsullied children of Anatolia, if we could speak, we wouldn’t be fighting. In most topics, we were thinking and defending the same ideas. The conclusion I got from what I read after, both sides had been used.

Finally, in 2019, Selahattin Şenliler, the current vice-president of the BBP, recalled his impressions of leftists as ‘idealists just like us’ and ‘coming from different cities of Anatolia and children of families similar to ours.’ He believed that if they could ask ‘Why are we here? What are we fighting for?’ there would not be any cause for fighting. Again, for Şenliler, a secret organization used Ülkücü and leftists like pawns. This pawn-like status not only lifted the responsibility of being involved in violent acts from the shoulders of Ülkücü politicians but also created the necessary ambiguity that will disturb neither the military nor other political groups. These examples show that Ülkücü politicians reproduced the same version of remembering the enemy throughout decades.

Furthermore, a striking quality of this version is its multidirectional character, especially in terms of borrowing across political groups. Starting from 2007, remembering the enemy as ‘the fellow victim’ is also instrumentalized by non-Ülkücü politicians who joined the AKP, aligning with the party’s claim to be a centrist party. For example, Metin Külünk, an AKP representative, claims to remember ‘the people from the leftist tradition were made to squeal with torture by hanging and electric shocks. Many people lost their lives in the cells of police centers. They were our children.’
Mahmut Esat Güven, who later found faith in Islam, and joined the AKP, defined the population of Mamak Military Prison as ‘the children of families with poor income, the children of this country.’ He added:

Being the kids of the same neighborhood or school, they talk about the same girls, same streets, same markets, or same teachers. The same gun kills one in the morning, and the other in the afternoon, but they were not aware of the situation.

So far, I provided evidence that remembering the enemy as ‘the fellow victim’ is closely attached to politicians’ post-ideological, centrist claims. As it was in the previous two versions, this version also preserved its form alongside its identity function. Without taking any responsibility for the violence that precipitated the coup, politicians embraced a victim status by arguing that the military mistreated the right and the left alike. Remembering the enemy through the version of ‘fellow victims’ helped politicians to manifest their break from the violent past. That past, in turn, was overwritten by the narratives of cruelty experienced in prisons, together with the enemy. The responsibility for the common suffering of ‘the children of Anatolia’ was attributed to an undetermined, hidden actor. Because of its ambiguity and de-ideologized rhetoric, this version of remembering the enemy was a perfect fit for those who wanted to realign their political position. Accordingly, it was borrowed across political groups in the post-coup era when anti-communism has lost its previous value as a political position with the demise of ideological politics and the rise of identity politics. Formerly incarcerated politicians considered the prison as a nest where they cohabitated with fellow victims and hatched their eggs of reconciliation before migrating to the center of the political spectrum.

Nevertheless, this version also appeared in two autobiographies by Çoklar and Livilik, although neither of them was a politician. Both published in the 2010s, these accounts share a rare critical engagement with their past in the Ülkücü Movement. Still, these engagements fell short of genuine coming to terms with the past as both present ways of whitewashing their past. For example, Çoklar is outspoken about his involvement in the violence that brought him respect within the movement. Yet, he claimed that ‘the big brothers of the movement’ abused his patriotic sentiments and used him as a hitman for their private interests. For remembering the cohabitant enemy, Çoklar’s narrative resembles Yazıcıoğlu’s, as he talks about his struggle to protect ‘a leftist kid’ from beatings. As another example, Livilik revealed how the Ülkücü disciplinary mechanism in prison utilized physical violence as punishment. He considers these punishments ‘as lasting wounds at the hearts of Ülkücü prisoners.’ Livilik was imprisoned at a very early age, and he portrayed himself as the right-wing counterpart of Erdal Eren. As a result of one of the most controversial actions of the
junta, Eren was executed despite his similarly young age. Livilik remembered his rapport with Erdal Eren:

Being two children of the two opposing views, we were transferred to the hospital in the same vehicle, and we were not fighting. If we could stay side by side for a while and talk, we could rise against the tyranny and torture that we experienced.97

His perspective perfectly reproduces remembering the enemy as ‘the fellow victim’ through an emphasis on youth. Altogether, Çoklar and Livilik are two accounts that showed glimpses of critical engagement with the past. Yet, their way of remembering the enemy in a positive manner still fell victim to whitewashing their involvement through being deceived and used or the innocence of youth.

**Conclusion**

There are several conclusions to be drawn from this tripartite memory of mixing-for-peace. First of all, mixing-for-peace was allegedly a project of reconciliation, a cure in the eyes of the military to the ideological feud that divided the country into two. More than forty years after the coup, the memory camps of far-right and far-left sustains their enmity toward each other. According to their accounts, neither mixing-for-peace’s actual implementation nor its legacy in collective memory lived up to its promise. Remembering the enemy as an irreconcilable other, either as ‘the unjust’ or as ‘the miserable fascist’ became an integral part of radical political identities in the post-coup era. The constitution and endurance of these two versions show that memory narratives with particular identity claims are resilient and alternate memory versions can coexist without competition, especially in cases of extreme polarization. The recurrent employment of these memory narratives is another layer of fortification around these isolated camps. The historical analysis of these versions also shows that themes and terminologies may remain dormant in collective memory which can be revitalized again after significant time. While present political agendas can play a role in the framing of collective memory, the endurance of similar storylines across decades gives credence to the idea that stickiness of collective memory is something to be taken seriously.

Secondly, this article also demonstrated that remembering the enemy as ‘the fellow victim’ transcends the aforementioned polarization, and displays enhancement between political groups. A multidirectional dynamic is at play for those who aim to depart these camps and reposition themselves in the center of the political spectrum as themes and terminologies are borrowed from one another. However, for the most part, this transcendence is seized by pragmatical reformulations of those who seek a place within post-coup
party politics. As Stern realized in his study of similarly isolated memory camps in Chile, although it is possible to conjoin these camps to an extent, and ‘build a larger memory camp,’ this possibility is extremely evasive.98 The majority of the post-coup identity reformulations were either sustained their enmity towards the other camp or accompanied by attempts of white-washing through self-acclaimed victimization which eclipsed a genuine project of coming to terms with the past.

Considering these two points together, this study has discovered that the conventional axis of left and right only holds for explaining the politics of memory in radical camps since both reproduce a particular version of remembering the enemy as an irreconcilable other. This axis, however, falls short in explaining the multidirectional memory dynamic among those who belong to these camps in the pre-coup era yet reformulated their political identities with newfound centrism in the post-coup era. In other words, with its identity claims, this centrist memory camp exists in contradistinction with both radical camps. Thus, finally, the findings of this article demonstrated that an additional analytical axis between radicalism and centrism is necessary for a more comprehensive understanding of post-coup memory politics in Turkey.

Notes
2. Ibid., 130–31.
3. Öztepe, 12 Eylül’den Sonra Mamak, 21.
5. Güven, Adalar Adalılar, 78.
7. Başkan, “At the Crossroads.”
9. These narratives were selected from a larger data set of my Ph.D. research. The dataset consists of 167 books that include 344 prison narratives of the 1980 military coup.
11. Özyürek, “Public Memory.”
15. Ibid.
18. See for example, Olick and Robbins, “Social Memory.”
20. See for example, Halbwachs, On Collective Memory, 49; Schudson, “Dynamics of Distortion,” 351; and Lowenthal, Foreign Country, 305.
26. Murer, “Constructing the Enemy-Other.”
30. Although I preserve my doubts on the mixing-for-peace program being uniquely a Turkish practice, the closest case I could find is the coexistence of IRA prisoners with the Ulster loyalists in Long Kesh Prison during the Troubles. However, they were never held in same wards and cells. Whereas in Turkey, there is news about the reinstallation of the mixing-for-peace in Turkish prisons where Kurdish insurgents, leftist extremists, putschist Gulenists, and the ISIS members were held in the same wards. For the recent allegations see, “12 Eylül uygulaması ‘Karıştır barıştır’ yine devredе.”
31. See Çolaşan, “Milliyet, Mamak Cezaevi’nde.”
33. Deniz Gezmiş, Hüseyin İnan, Yusuf Aslan were executed, Mahir Çayan and his comrades were killed in armed combat, and İbrahim Kaypakkaya was tortured to death. For the legacy of previous generation of leftists on the generation of 1970s, see Ersan, 1970’lerde Türkiye Solu, 15–58.
35. Mavioğlu, Asılmayıp Beslenenler, 233.
36. Ibid., 234.
37. Babacan, Yıldızla Yaşayanlar, 101; Arikan, Büyük Tutsaklık, 106.
38. Çelik, Tek Yola Sığmayan Devrim, 120.
39. Çalışlar, 12 Mart’tan, 39.
40. Memişoğlu, Kivamını Tutturamaduk, 131.
42. Oza, En Uzun Eylül, 69.
43. Babacan, Yıldızla Yaşayanlar, 100.
44. Ibid., 156.
45. Ibid., 69.
46. Ibid., 168.
47. Çelik, Tek Yola Sığmayan Devrim, 119.
48. Çalışlar, 12 Mart’tan, 64; Alişanoğlu, Netekim, 146; Uruş, 12 Sanık, 106; Gevher, Mamak, 109–10.
49. Yurtsever, Yükseliş ve Düşüş, 318; Aydınoğlu, Türkiye Solu, 402.
50. See, for example, Müftüoğlu, Geçmişı Aşabilmek.
51. See Aytürk, “Yetmişli Yıllarda Ülkücü Hareket.”
54. See Arpacı, Taşmedrese Sohbetleri.
55. The phrase was a reference to the story of the iniquitous incarceration of Biblical Joseph who continued to spread God’s word in prison.
56. For a compilation of Ülkücü writings on prison and earlier usage of ‘the just and the unjust’ dichotomy, see Öznr, Ülkücü Hareket, especially the final chapter ‘Cezaevleri ve Ülkücü Hareket.’
57. Bahadır, 12 Eylül ve Ülkücüler, 31.
58. Öztepe, 12 Eylül’den Sonra, 137.
59. Ibid., 21.
60. Bahadır, 12 Eylül ve Ülkücüler, 261.
61. Ibid., 180, 189, 252; Akabe, Cezaevi Taşmedrese Yusufiye, 7.
62. Bahadır, 12 Eylül ve Ülkücüler, 85.
63. See Kürşat, 12 Eylül Zindanlarında.
64. Cengiz, Kapalı, 36; Küçükizsiz, Ülkücülerin Çilesi, 163.
65. Açba, Mamak Zulûm Kalesi, 106; Toksoy, Dördüncü Cemre, 38.
66. Açba, Mamak Zulûm Kalesi, 106.
67. In this regard, Zihni Açba is an exceptional figure who was elected to the parliament in 2015 as a MHP representative. Still, his views draw apart from the party’s headquarters in 2017 as he opposed the presidential system and resigned from his duties in the constitutional committee. He did not run in the elections next year. See ‘MHP’li Vekil Zihni Açba.’
68. Harris, “Military Coups.”
69. Another way of surpassing the threshold was to form electoral alliances. In 1991 general elections, a far-right alliance with nationalist and Islamist components gathered under the Welfare Party and successfully entered the parliament with 16.9% vote.
70. For some, this shift occurred on a more profound basis. See Göle, “Toward an Autonomization.”
71. Ahmad, Modern Turkey, 188.
73. Ergil, “Identity Crises.”
74. For some, the MHP had given up its identity to become respectful in the eyes of the governing ossified military-bureaucratic elite.’ See Yavuz, “The Politics of Fear.”
75. Indeed, the recruits of the Ülkücü Movement in metropolitan areas shared a similar reflex against social inequality with the recruits of the leftist factions. See Bora and Can, Devlet Oacak Dergah, 65–9.
76. Yaziçoğlu, 12 Eylül Günleri, 44.
77. Ibid., 68–9.
78. Ibid.
79. Müftüoğlu, Copların Askerleri, 18.
80. Ibid.
81. Ibid., 20.
82. Ibid., 21.
83. Akpınar, Kurtların Kardeşliği, 177.
84. Öztunc, Ülkücüler 12 Eylül’ü Anlatıyor, 220.
85. İçmeli, Kırık Kurşun, 123.
86. Şenliler, Mamak Cezaevi Günlüğü, 32, 69.
87. Ibid., 6, 9, 11-12.
88. Külünk, Büyük Anadolu Aklı, 135.
89. Güven, Adalar Adalılar, 78.
90. Akyıldız and Bora argue that the 1970s were treated as ‘a dark age’ in the Ülkücü memory which hinders the possibility of coming to terms with the violent past. See Akyıldız and Bora, “Siyasal Hafıza.”
91. Ayata, “Emergence of Identity.”
92. Çoklar’s memoir lacks a date of publication. According to information available online, it was published in 2013. See “Gazeteci İsa Aydın’ın.”
93. Aydın, 12 Eylül, 21, 55.
94. Ibid., 90, 100.
95. Ibid., 47.
96. Ibid., 45.
97. Livilik, Ülkücünün İmtihanı, 203.
98. Stern, Remembering Pinochet’s Chile, 103.

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Note on contributor
Gökhan Şensoğmez is a Ph.D. Candidate at Bilkent University. His doctoral research focuses on the carceral memory of the 1980 military coup in Turkey.

ORCID
Gökhan Şensoğmez http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4020-2945

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