



KADİR HAS UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
DEPARTMENT OF ART AND DESIGN

**PLACE, MEMORY, AND MEMORIALIZATION:  
A DISCUSSION ON YASSIADA THROUGH THE LENS OF  
A PROGRESSIVE SENSE OF PLACE**

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MASTER'S THESIS

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İSTANBUL, JULY, 2021

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PLACE, MEMORY, AND MEMORIALIZATION:  
A DISCUSSION ON YASSIADA THROUGH THE LENS OF A PROGRESSIVE  
SENSE OF PLACE

**ABSTRACT**

Yassıada, one of the archipelago of the Princes' Islands in the Sea of Marmara near İstanbul, has undergone a radical spatial transformation in both material and discursive terms in recent years. Owned by the Treasury and designated as a Military Area, Yassıada was allocated to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 2011 by the General Directorate of National Real Estate to be used as a museum. Also, in the 1/5000 Scale Conservation Master Plan of the Adalar District, which has been approved in 2011, Yassıada was designated as First Degree Natural Protected Area, Historic Protected Area, and Third Degree Archaeological Protected Area. However, in 2012, Yassıada's Natural and Historic Protected Area statuses were abolished, and the island was declared a Sustainable Conservation and Restricted Use Area. Then, in 2013, a revision of the master plan was made to transform the island together with the neighboring Sivriada for a variety of functions, and the island was also renamed Democracy and Freedom Island. And in 2015, the groundbreaking ceremony of the project, which was carried out by the MESA Holding and prepared to function the island as a congress and tourism center with buildings such as restaurants, hotels, museums, and conference halls, was held. Finally, on the sixtieth anniversary of the first coup d'état of the Turkish Republic, on May 27th, 2020, Democracy and Freedom Island was inaugurated as a congress center and open-air museum.

This recent spatial transformation process of Yassıada frequently appears in various mediums as a controversial topic among politicians, experts, bureaucrats, non-governmental organizations, and citizens. The ruling Justice and Development Party's discourses about the process are based on the memorialization of decedent Prime Minister Adnan Menderes' trials in Yassıada and the May 27th, 1960, military coup d'état. Accordingly, most of the government agencies also utter the process as a process

of memorialization. On the other hand, civil initiatives, which mostly embrace islander identity, base their discourses on the destruction of natural, historical, and cultural heritage. And many professional associations (Chamber of City Planners, Turkish Archaeologists Association, et al.) mount a similar argument with them. In a sense, two discourses that rest on different foundations regarding the process compete to define the 'place': Yassiada as a place of memory and Yassiada as a heritage site.

In this study, following Doreen Massey's (1991; 1994) concept of 'progressive sense of place', I examine the material and discursive reconstruction of Yassiada through the discourses, claims, and strategies of the different actors regarding the island. Focusing on the period from May 27th, 1960, military coup d'etat till the island's museumification with the name of Democracy and Freedoms Island, I explore how these discourses, claims, and strategies singularize the identity of the island as a place and exclude different interpretations and experiences. Drawing on this exploration, I aim to consider the different spatial, social, and historical characters of Yassiada as a whole and discuss the possibilities of a more progressive sense of place over Yassiada.

**Keywords:** Place, Memory, Memorialization, İstanbul, Prince's Islands, Yassiada, Plati, Democracy and Freedom Island.

YER, HAFIZA VE HAFIZALAŐTIRMA:  
İLERİCİ BİR YER ANLAYIŐI MERCEĐİNDEN YASSIADA TARTIŐMASI

**ÖZET**

Marmara Denizi'nde yer alan Prens Adaları'ndan biri olan Yassıada son yıllarda gerek materyal gerekse söylemsel alanlarda radikal bir mekânsal dönüşüme maruz kalmıştır. Hazine mülkiyetinde olan ve Askeri Bölge olarak belirlenmiş Yassıada, 2011 yılında Milli Emlak Genel Müdürlüğü tarafından müze olarak kullanılmak üzere Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı'na tahsis edilmiştir. Yine 2011 yılında yürürlüğe giren Adalar İlçesi 1/5000 Ölçekli Koruma Amaçlı Nazım İmar Planı'nda Yassıada, I. Derece Doğal Sit, Tarihi Sit ve III. Derece Arkeolojik Sit Alanı olarak gösterilmiştir. 2012 yılında adanın I. Derece Doğal Sit ve Tarihi Sit statüleri kaldırılmış ve ada, Sürdürülebilir Koruma ve Kontrollü Kullanım Alanı olarak belirlenmiştir. 2013 yılında, yapılan plan revizyonlarıyla turizm ve kongre merkezi üst başlıklı her türden kullanıma açık hale gelen Yassıada'nın ismi de resmen Demokrasi ve Özgürlükler Adası olarak değiştirilmiştir. 2015 yılında da adayı restoran, otel, müze, konferans salonu gibi yapılarla bir kongre ve turizm merkezi olarak işlevlendirmeye yönelik hazırlanan ve MESA Holding tarafından yürütölen projenin temel atma töreni gerçekleştirilmiştir. Türkiye'nin ilk askeri darbesinin altmışıncı yıl dönümü olan 27 Mayıs 2020 tarihinde ise Demokrasi ve Özgürlükler Adası'nın bir kongre merkezi ve açık hava müzesi olarak açılıőı yapılmıştır.

Yassıada'nın yakın zamanlı bu mekânsal dönüşüm süreci çeşitli mecralarda sıklıkla politikacılar, uzmanlar, bürokratlar, sivil toplum kuruluşları ve kentliler arasındaki ihtilafli bir konu olarak yer almaktadır. İktidardaki Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi'nin süreç hakkındaki söylemleri merhum başbakan Adnan Menderes'in Yassıada'daki duruşmalarının ve 27 Mayıs 1960 Askeri Darbesi'nin hafızalaştırılması üzerine temellenmektedir. Buna bağılı olarak resmi kurumların çoğu da bu süreci bir hafızalaştırma süreci olarak dile getirmektedir. Çoğunlukla 'adalı' kimliğini benimsemiş inisiyatifler ise bu dönüşüm süreci hakkındaki söylemlerini doğal, tarihi ve kültürel

mirasın tahribatı üzerine temellendirmektedir. Birçok meslek örgütü de (Şehir Plancıları Odası, Arkeologlar Derneği vd.) bu inisiyatiflerle benzer argümanlar ortaya koymaktadır. Bir bakıma, süreçle ilgili farklı temellere sahip iki söylem ‘yer’i tanımlamak için âdeta rekabet hâindedir: Bir hafıza mekânı olarak Yassıada ve bir miras alanı olarak Yassıada.

Bu çalışmada, Yassıada’nın gerek materyal gerekse söylemsel yeniden inşasını 27 Mayıs 1960 Askeri Darbesi’nden adanın Demokrasi ve Özgürlükler Adası adıyla müzeleştirilmesine kadar geçen süreç içerisinde, farklı aktörlerin adaya ilişkin geliştirdikleri söylemler, savlar ve stratejiler aracılığıyla irdeliyorum. Doreen Massey’nin (1991; 1994) yere dair ‘ilerici bir yer anlayışı’ tanımıyla önerdiği kavramsallaştırma biçiminden faydalanarak bu söylemler, savlar ve stratejilerin bir yer olarak adanın kimliğini nasıl tekilleştirdiğini, farklı yorum ve deneyimleri nasıl dışladığını ortaya koyuyorum. Tüm bunlardan yola çıkarak, Yassıada’nın farklı mekânsal, toplumsal ve tarihsel niteliklerini bir bütün içinde anlayıp değerlendirmeyi ve Yassıada üzerine daha ilerici bir yer anlayışının olasılıklarını tartışmaya açmayı amaçlıyorum.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Yer, Hafıza, Hafızalaştırma, İstanbul, Adalar, Yassıada, Plati, Demokrasi ve Özgürlükler Adası.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Yassıada and Sivriada, formerly known as Plati and Oxia, are two neighboring islands in the Sea of Marmara which the former has a flat form, and the other has a pointed one. I encountered the story of these islands for the first time during my visits to Büyükada in the summer of 2015. Before, Yassıada and Sivriada were just blurry landscapes that accompanied my ferry trips, and at the time, I supposed that Yassıada was the island where decedent prime minister Adnan Menderes was executed.<sup>1</sup>

During that summer of 2015, in Büyükada, I met various civil initiatives of the Prince's Islands. Yassıada and Sivriada were discussed in many of their meetings due to construction activities started in these two islands. The ruling Justice and Development Party were declaring that a democracy museum would be built on Yassıada to commemorate the heroes of democracy, i.e., Adnan Menderes and his fellows (*Hürriyet Daily News*, 14.05.2015). However, regarding the civil initiatives' point of view, under the pretense of keeping the memory of Menderes and his comrades' alive, the destruction of the natural and historical heritage of the island for land speculation was unacceptable (*Dokuz Ada Bir Deniz*, 2015a).

I have always had a specific interest in the concepts of memory and heritage, and the conflicts as to which and whose memory/heritage was worth accentuation and appreciation in the representation of the place. In the case of Yassıada, we have, on the one hand, a neoliberal-populist government who imagines the island as a place of sacred political memory, and, on the other hand, urban movements who put forward an image of the island as a natural, historical site of heritage. After learning about the political

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<sup>1</sup> Contrary to popular belief, Adnan Menderes was not executed in Yassıada but İmralı Island.

reminiscences of Yassıada, I started to consider the island as the place of a symbolic conflict between the imaginations of these actors.

The construction project, which has been ongoing in Yassıada since May 14th, 2015, was completed in 2020. On May 27th, 2020, the sixtieth anniversary of the first coup d'état of the Turkish Republic, Yassıada was inaugurated as a congress center and open-air museum under the name Democracy and Freedom Island. In fact, in the political climate of the early 2000s, Turkey's many 'sites of atrocity' were on the agenda of the governing JDP and were subject to museumification projects. As Çaylı (2014) states, "such sites include the Madimak Hotel where 37 were killed by arson on July 2nd, 1993; the Diyarbakir Prison where tens of Kurdish political inmates were tortured en masse over the years that followed the 1980 coup; and the recently museumified Ulucanlar Prison where key revolutionary figures from the 1970s leftist student movement were hanged" (p.14). But, as distinguished from such sites, Yassıada has been the place where the legacy of the victims is claimed by the JDP. Considering the discourses and claims of the JDP regarding Yassıada, I started to investigate the museumified island. Due to the pandemic conditions of 2020-2021, I couldn't visit the island, and therefore the news portals giving coverage to Democracy and Freedom Island were my primary sources. As I went through the sources, I realized that the museumified island was inviting one to forget the last material traces of the events Yassıada born witness through the strategies implemented in a top-down manner. Although the events Yassıada witnessed exist in the collective memory, it was striking that during the memorialization or rather museumification process, neither public-official bodies nor private-commercial ventures did not take into consideration the wide range of meanings Yassıada conveys for different actors.

Thinking about the discursive and material reconstruction of Yassıada within the context I provide above led me to question the discourses, claims, and strategies that singularize the island. I consider these discourses, claims, and strategies of different actors as symptoms of their reactionary positions regarding the island. But what might it mean to reorientate these reactionary positions to more relational, progressive ones? What sorts of political implications might 'place' enable when it is experienced and conceptualized through a progressive sense? What might such experience and

conceptualization mean for the conflicts over the representation of place? And again, how might such experience and conceptualization transform understandings of memory and heritage?

### **1.1 Aim of the Study**

Yassıada has failed in the sense of being a place contributing to the practices of confronting the coup era of Turkey while preserving all its natural, cultural, and historical assets. In this study, I aim to focus on this failure and try to conceptualize the roles of reactionary senses of place in this failure. In particular, I will question the reactionary senses that are tried to be legitimized in the name of memory and heritage by excluding the multiplicity of imaginations of place.

Finally, the main objective of this study is to provide a framework to understand a progressive sense of place. I believe that a discussion on the discursive and material reconstruction of Yassıada may shed light on the sensitivities of a progressive sense of place both in theoretical and practical terms.

### **1.2 Theoretical and Methodological Approach**

This study is inspired by feminist geographer Doreen Massey's discussions on place and competing discourses on the history and identity of places. Massey distinguishes between a reactionary sense of place and a progressive one. The reactionary sense of place refers to a bounded view of place, which is also inward-looking and self-closing (Massey, 1991). In contrast to looking at places with a reactionary sense, the progressive sense of place, according to her, hinges on a conceptualization of place as unbounded, relational, and open. This progressive sense considers place as a site of the multiplicity of identities and histories and ongoing material and social interactions with the wider world. It rejects thinking of places as areas with clearly defined boundaries that work to separate an 'inside' from an 'outside', 'us' from 'them' (Ibid., p.28).

In her book 'For Space', Massey (2005) invites us to think about the spatial challenges of a progressive sense of place. The book begins with three ruminations. In the first one,

Massey tells us the story of the arrival of the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés to Tenochtitlán, the capital of the city of Aztecs, and elaborates on how this story is often told as a story of discovery and conquest: Cortés, “a maker of history”, passed over the space, discovered Tenochtitlán and then conquered it (Massey, 2005, p.4). Her argument here is that this way of telling the story works to imagine space as a ‘surface’, as something to be crossed, and equates it with the land and the sea. Moreover, this imagination has social and political effects that lead us to conceive other places, peoples, and cultures simply as phenomena ‘on’ this surface: As if the Aztecs, deprived of their own histories, their own trajectories, immobilized, lie there and await Cortés’ arrival (Ibid.). Massey asks what might it mean to question this habit of thinking of space as a surface and what would happen to our implicit imaginations of time and space if, instead, we conceived of a meeting-up of histories (Ibid.).

Her second rumination begins with a proposition delivered by former US president Bill Clinton on the inevitability of globalization: “We can no more resist the current forces of globalization than we can resist the force of gravity” (Ibid., p.5). According to this proposition, Massey argues, places like Moçambique or Nicaragua are just backward countries that eventually would follow the path laid down by the capitalist West. Most importantly, what this proposition implicitly says is that Moçambique or Nicaragua are not that much different from ‘us’; it negates the possibility that they have their own trajectories, histories, or their own possible futures. In this way, Massey argues, the proposition “turns geography into history, space into time” (Ibid.). Then she asks: “What if we refuse to convene space into time? What if we open up the imagination of the single narrative to give space for a multiplicity of trajectories? What kinds of conceptualization of time and space, and of their relation, might that give on to?” (Ibid.).

Massey’s third rumination is on the notion of place and how place -often evoked as ‘local place’- has come to have a totemic resonance in various political arguments (Ibid.). Mainly mobilized in conservative and nationalist discourses, the symbolic value of place has come to represent “the geographical source of meaning”, “the sphere of the everyday”, “the building of walls against the new invasions” (Ibid., pp. 5-6). Massey draws attention to the implicit assumption underlying these discourses, that is, the

assumption that there is a clear distinction between place (as home) and space (as outside). To question this, she problematizes notions of 'local struggles' and the 'defense of place': "But then what of the defense of place by working-class communities in the teeth of globalization, or by aboriginal groups clinging to a last bit of land?" (Ibid., p.6) Really, what would happen to the implicit assumption of place as hostility to outsiders if we consider the role place plays in resistance to unemployment and inequality?

All these ruminations challenge the singular grand narratives of the modern world (such as those of the story of the globalization led by the West, which places others at an earlier stage at a historical queue), and attempt to embrace the differences, the multiplicity of points of view and the multiplicity of histories. These ruminations form the basis for three spatial propositions, which shed light on the sensitivities of a progressive sense of place: An imagination of space as constructed from interrelations and interactions; an imagination of space as the sphere in which multiple trajectories coalesce; and an imagination of space as a process since it is never closed or finished (Ibid., p.9).

How can these propositions be adopted for a better understanding of the histories and identities of places, particularly in the face of competing claims on a place, articulated on the basis of particular interpretations of its past? In her article '*Places and Their Pasts*', Massey (1995) uses the notion of "envelopes of space-time" to refer to specific periods of time that supposedly define a place's essential character (p.188). As she points at in the article, different groups may conflict on the basis of 'envelopes of space-time' to characterize and define a place, and, when these envelopes were fixed as static, they are more often used to legitimize the views and claims of the present and a possible future. What a particular envelope contains and supports, however, always depends on the exercise of power relations (Ibid., p.190), and on the "histories which are told, how those histories are told, and which history turns out to be dominant" (Ibid., p.186). Then, Massey asks how the characterization of places can be done *responsibly* (Ibid., p.190). Paying attention to the sensitivities of a progressive sense of place, Massey insists on an understanding which "[does] not try to seal a place up into one neat and

tidy envelope of space-time” but embraces the multiple presents as a coalescence of many pasts (Ibid., p.191).

This understanding of a progressive sense of place constitutes the backbone of my thesis. While discussing the discursive and material reconstructions of Yassıada, I work with this understanding to question the discourses, claims, and strategies that singularize the island and that close down the possibility for alternative voices and histories to be heard. I believe that a progressive sense of place can provide a forum for negotiations across multiple identities of Yassıada and open the way for embracing the island as “a simultaneity of stories (of *histories, changes, movements*) so far” (Massey, 2005, p.9).

### **1.3 Outline**

Following the Introduction, in Chapter II, starting from the first coup d'état of the Turkish Republic and the Yassıada trials, I seek to depict the difficult history of the island. I dwell on how this history is interpreted by groups that have different socio-historical positions. In Chapter III, I investigate the recent spatial transformation of Yassıada along with the competing discourses and claims of different actors associated with the island. Together with the social/political backgrounds of the actors, I provide the processes in which these actors' discourses and positions regarding the island were shaped to enable a relational understanding of place. This part of my study can be interpreted as an attempt to investigate certain shifts in which Yassıada became a stage to remold memory and identity. In Chapter IV, I focus on the ways in which Democracy and Freedom Island relate to the past. In Chapter V, I critically analyze the strategies implemented during the museumification of the island in consideration of a number of spatial practices of memorialization from Turkey and the world. The thesis concludes with a comprehensive discussion where the research findings are interpreted together with the theoretical approach of the thesis.

## 2. REVISITING THE HISTORICAL NARRATIVE: YASSIADA FROM 1960 TO TODAY

Yassıada and Sivriada<sup>2</sup> are two neighboring islands in the Sea of Marmara which the former has a flat form, and the other has a pointed one. These islands formerly were known as Plati and Oxia. During the Byzantine period, these islands, too, were places of exile with the rest of the Princes' Islands<sup>3</sup> (Çankaya, 2016; Pinguet, 2018).

Batur states that initial historical records on Plati (Yassıada) date back to the fourth century with Catholicos St. Nerses the Great was exiled to the island (2006, p.38). Then, in the ninth century, between 829-846, the Byzantine Emperor Theophilos had the Platea monastery built on the island. In the same period, St. Ignatios, the Patriarch of Constantinople, had the Forty Saints church built right in the middle of Plati with four large cellars underneath (Ibid., pp. 39-40). And in 1412, the Byzantine army defeated the Ottomans in the offshore waters of Plati (Batur, 2006, p.45; Schlumberger, 2016, p.187).

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<sup>2</sup> Following the *Great Dog Massacre of 1910*, the name of Sivriada was changed to Hayırsızada (*Wicked Island*): After the overthrow of Sultan Abdulhamid II, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) that seized power has massacred approximately 80.000 dogs by deporting them to Sivriada. There, in the bare tiny rocky island of the Sea of Marmara, “due to starvation and hot weather, thousands of dogs died by shredding each other” (Timur 1994; Akçaoğlu 1997; Hür 2008; Pinguet 2008; Avèdikian 2010; Sarıkuş 2010; Schick 2010, cited in Alkan, 2016, p. 617). In Yıldırım’s terms, “in animal rights literature, this massacre is also referred to as the first genocide of the 20th century” (2019). Schick associates this *Great Dog Massacre of 1910* with the nature of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) in power at the time (2010, p.31): In general, the Sultans are thought to be despots who have absolute power. But in fact, the political necessities, religious control, and public opinion had largely limited their potency. Unlike the Sultans, the Unionists were not subject to a moral contract since “the source of their legitimacy was not divine, but secular” (Ibid.). And, since they came to power through a military coup, they did not have to give account to anyone else (Ibid.). Thus, by implementing spatial strategies such as deportation and isolation, they were able to eradicate the dogs systemically. Only a few years later, in 1915, these spatial strategies were implemented again by the CUP: Armenian civilians were deported to the desert of Der Zor, Syria. In this way, another unwanted “social body” was reduced to “acceptable demographic proportions” (Kèvorkian, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Princes' Islands consist of Büyükada, Heybeliada, Burgazada, Kınalıada, Kaşıkadası, Sedefadası, Yassıada, Sivriada, and Tavşanadası.

In 1859, Sir Henry Bulwer, British Ambassador to Constantinople at that time, bought the island (Zarifi, 2005, p.238; Batur, 2006, p.46; Guymer, 2011, p.189; Pinguet, 2018, p.169). Guymer states that Bulwer has turned the island into “an enormous market garden where white donkeys were bred and cotton was grown” (2011, pp. 189-190). Moreover, Bulwer had two mansions built resembling the chateaus of the Middle Ages on the island to architect Konstantinos Dimadis (Kuban and Ozar, 2016, p.16). Finally, in 1865, Bulwer sold the island to the Egyptian Viceroy, Ismail Pasha (Guymer, 2011, p. 190).



Image 2.1 The mansion of Sir Henry Bulwer on the coast of Yassıada, available at: <http://www.levantineheritage.com/bulwers-castle.htm> (accessed: March 2021)



Image 2.2 The mansion of Sir Henry Bulwer in the center of Yassiada, available at:  
<http://www.levantineheritage.com/bulwers-castle.htm> (accessed: March 2021)



Image 2.3 The mansion of Sir Henry Bulwer, Yassiada  
(SALT Research, Ali Saim Ülgen Archive)

In 1947, Yassıada was bought by the Navy, and military facilities were established on the island (Akpınar, 1984, cited in Çankaya, 2016, p.37). The island was used as a courtroom and prison during the trial of the Menderes government after the coup d'état of May 27, 1960. Until 1978, Yassıada was the training base of the Naval Forces Command. Then in 1979, the High Council of Real Estate Antiquities and Monuments announced all islands to be “Natural and Historical Sites in Need of Protection” (TMMOB Şehir Plancıları Odası İstanbul Şubesi, 2016, p.25). In 1993, the Faculty of Aquatic Sciences of İstanbul University was moved to Yassıada. However, due to “tough working conditions and transportation difficulties”, the university has left the island in 1995 (Pinguet, 2018, p. 174).

Now, with an aim to create a basis for the competing discourses and claims over the island, I would like to highlight a particular reading of Yassıada's past: The first coup d'état of the Turkish Republic, and the Yassıada trials.

### **2.1 The First Coup d'état of the Turkish Republic: May 27, 1960**

After decades of single-party rule in Turkey following the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923, a transition towards multi-party rule took place in 1946. And Democratic Party (DP), which was founded by the cadres whose political socialization began in the single-party regime, came to power after the first free elections in 1950 (Bora, 2017, p.532). Until 1954, the party under Prime Minister Adnan Menderes would be successful due to reasons such as “foreign exchange reserves, the demand created by the Korean War, rainy weather, and the public's reaction to the single-party regime” (Oran, 2020, p.76). The pressure on conservative segments of society had decreased. Production and trade had improved, and the private sector had started a dynamic breakthrough (Ibid.). Menderes was personally engaged in the road-building projects and public works of İstanbul and attributed a political value to the development provided by the DP (Bora, 2017, p.538).<sup>4</sup> After 1954, the economy was disrupted as a

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<sup>4</sup> The Democratic Party government led by Adnan Menderes enacted a new zoning law within the scope of the İstanbul Zoning Project in 1956 and, after a while, an expropriation law. Approximately 7.300 buildings, including historical artifacts, were expropriated and demolished between 1956 and 1960 for the project (Akpınar, 2015).

result of drought and unplanned development (Oran, 2020, p.76). Rising inflation especially deteriorated the economic situation of civil servants. As political opposition increased, the DP began to implement repressive measures, enacted a series of laws limiting freedom of speech, censored the press. On April 18, 1960, an ‘Investigation Commission’ consisting entirely of DP members and having extraordinary powers, including judicial powers, was established in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey to silence the opposition and the press. The result was the student protests that lasted one month and a military coup immediately afterward (Ibid.). At three o’clock in the morning of May 27, Colonel Alpaslan Türkeş, who read a statement on the radio, announced that the Turkish Armed Forces took over the administration of the country to ‘prevent the fight between brothers’ and ‘save democracy from the crisis’ (Zürcher, 2020, p.279). The government of Adnan Menderes was overthrown by the first coup d’état of the Turkish Republic. Power was now in the hands of the National Unity Committee headed by General Cemal Gürsel.

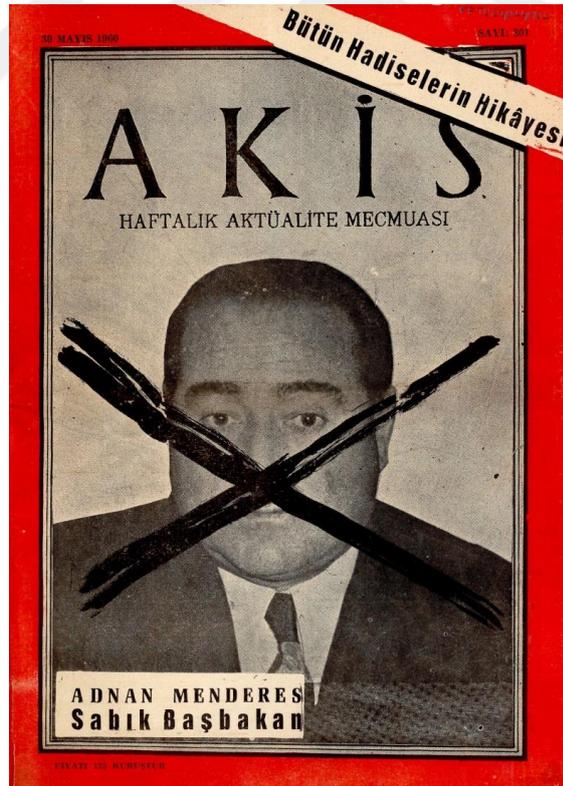


Image 2.4 Adnan Menderes on the cover of *Akis* magazine, May 30th, 1960  
(SALT Research, Feridun Fazıl Tülbentçi Archive)

## 2.2 Yassıada Trials

Yassıada trials establish a legal basis for the political murders of the 1960 coup. After the coup, the island was used as a courtroom and prison during the trials of leading DP cadres (Pinguet, 2018, p.173). The defendants, Adnan Menderes and his fellows were held in prison on the island throughout the judicial process. A court was set up in the Navy gymnasium on the island for the trial of the defendants. In the process, advanced security measures were taken on the island, which is roughly 300 meters long and 150 meters wide (Ibid.). ‘Yassıada Brochure’ published by the Liaison Bureau of the National Unity Committee in October 1960, includes the plans of the courtroom, and of the ferries providing access to the island for witnesses and those who have permission to follow the trials; each seat is numbered (Image 2.5; 2.6). The brochure specifies the instructions to be followed on the island one by one. It had been forbidden to use tapes, take photographs, carry sharp objects, explosives, or anything that could be used as a weapon, and have a swim. And walking, talking loudly, smoking, clapping, and booing around the courtroom, too (p.31). It is stated that if the areas surrounded by barbed wire were approached, the guards would open fire (p.32).

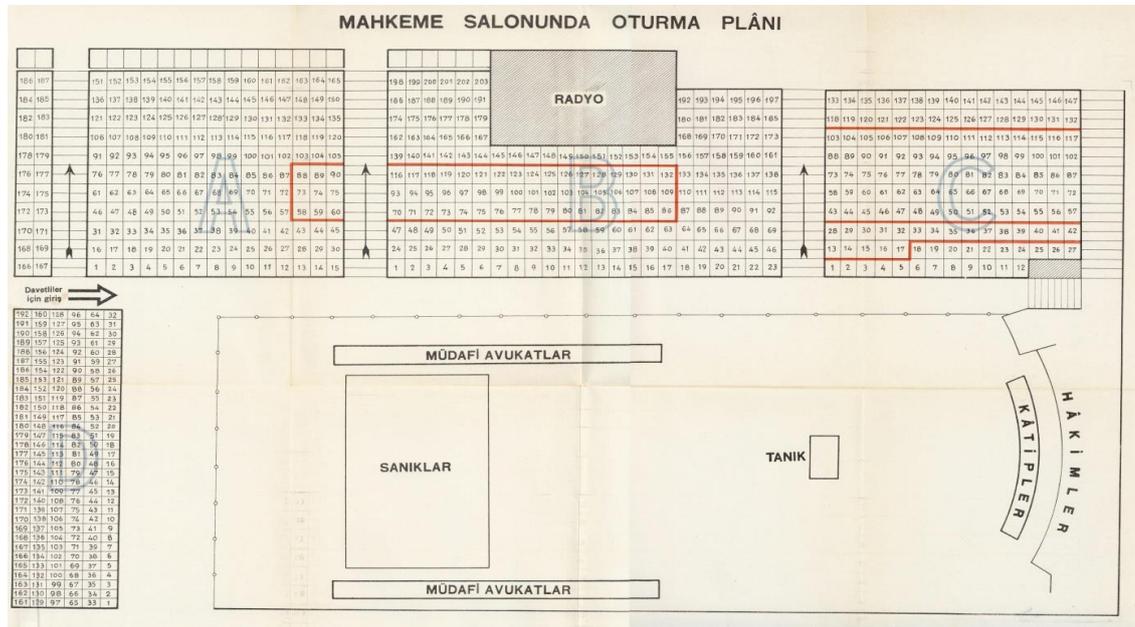


Image 2.5 Seating plan of the courtroom (Yassıada Brochure, 1960)

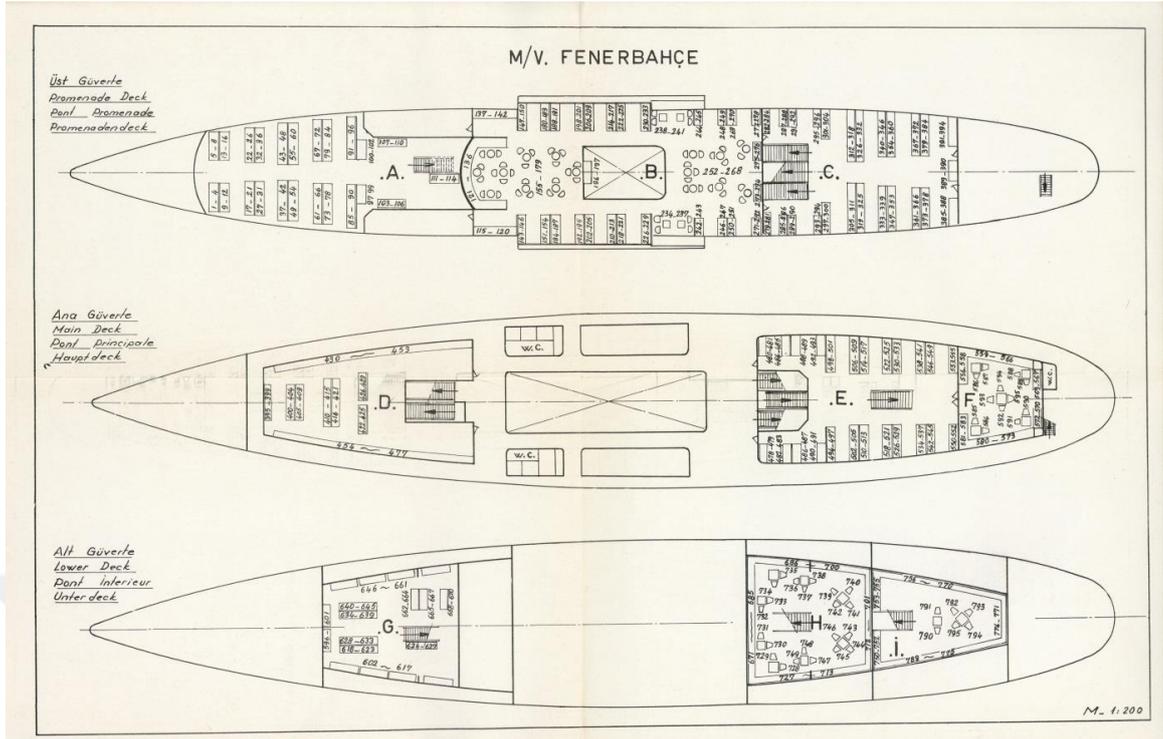


Image 2.6 Seating plan of Fenerbahçe ferry (Yassıda Brochure, 1960)

The trial process in Yassıda has been turned into a process of punishment, humiliation, and exile (Ağaoğlu, 2011[1967]; 2011[1972]). As a result of a total of 19 long trials in which “the right to a fair trial was disregarded in many respects”, 123 people were acquitted, 31 people were sentenced to life imprisonment, and 418 people were sentenced to various prison sentences (Pinguet, 2018, p.173). Three of the fifteen death sentences issued by the court were executed. In virtue of his advanced age, Celal Bayar, the first president of the Turkish Republic who has no military background, escaped the execution. On September 16, 1961, former Foreign Minister Fatih Rüştü Zorlu and former Finance Minister Hasan Polatkan were executed. Former Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, who made an unsuccessful suicide attempt, was executed the next day (Ibid.). Contrary to what many think today, Zorlu, Polatkan, and Menderes were not executed in Yassıda but in İmralı Island, an isolated military zone closed to civilians.



Image 2.7 Yassıda trials (SALT Research, Sabiha Rüştü Bozcalı Archive)



Image 2.8 Yassıda trials (SALT Research, Sabiha Rüştü Bozcalı Archive)

The Democratic Party government was also charged with the Pogrom<sup>5</sup> of 6-7 September (1955) in the Yassıada trials. Adnan Menderes and Fatih Rüştü Zorlu were held responsible for “inciting hatred towards Greeks and other minorities” as a result of the case of the Pogrom of 6-7 September that lasted from October 19, 1960, to January 5, 1961 (Pinguet, 2018, p.173). This verdict led to an unexpected result. The Pogrom of 6-7 September was politicized and accepted as a “black day” by the public opinion of Turkey (Güven, 2012, p.162). Although the ‘collective violence’ went unpunished as a result of the trial, this acceptance is important.

### 2.3 An Overview of the Socio-Political Imagination

The military coup was greeted with great joy by the people in Ankara and İstanbul. Especially among the students in both cities and the intellectuals in general (Zürcher, 2020, p.279). Pars Tuğlacı cites that on May 27, 1960, Flower Festival was held in Büyükkada, the center of Adalar district, in order to celebrate the coup d’etat. The convoy of cars decorated with flowers had toured the entire island and had been greeted with joyful demonstrations when it returned to where it started. One of the wreaths carried by the cars had the phrase “In the Footsteps of Atatürk” (Tuğlacı, 1995, cited in Çankaya, 2016, p.44). In 1963, May 27 was declared a national holiday under the name of “Freedom and Constitution Day” (*Resmî Gazete*, 13.04.1963, p.1). Until the year 1981 was celebrated as one of Turkey’s national holidays (*Cumhuriyet*, 21.03.1981, p.2).

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<sup>5</sup> What happened on 6-7 September 1955, in general, is mentioned as ‘Events of 6-7 September’ in Turkey. I prefer the word ‘pogrom’, whose shortest definition can be made as “collective violence against an ethnic group” (Turan, 2019). Because I think that the word ‘events’ underestimates the extent of what happened on 6-7 September. On September 6-7, 1955, 11 people died, hundreds of people were injured, and women were raped as a result of the lynch and pillage against the non-Muslim community, mainly Greeks. Besides, a total of 5317 places were attacked, including houses, workplaces, churches, monasteries, synagogues, schools, factories, hotels, and bars (Ibid.).



Image 2.9 Gazi Education Institute students protesting Adnan Menderes in the march for Youth and Sports Day on May 19 (SALT Research, Art Archive)



Image 2.10 Gazi Education Institute students protesting Adnan Menderes in the march for Youth and Sports Day on May 19 (SALT Research, Art Archive)

May 27, 1960 coup is generally referred to as a “good coup” since it resulted in the 1961 Constitution, which mainly aims to construct a plural democracy (Oran, 2020, p.94). “The secular elite, in particular, saw the 1960 coup as a progressive ‘revolution’ for decades” (Oğur, 2015). Besides, the left-wing of Turkey too gave privilege to the 1960 coup until the failed coup attempts of the 2000s (Bilgin, 2020). It can be said that both the national holiday of the 1960s (Freedom and Constitution Day) and the privilege given by the left-wing paved the path of ‘oblivion’ for the May 27, 1960 coup and Yassıada trials.

However, “Adnan Menderes has always been extremely popular among rural and conservative segments of society, and thus became a symbol of right-wing politics in Turkey, as well as a troublesome figure for Kemalists” (Hafıza Merkezi, no date). Concerning rising of right-wing in Turkey, in 1990, a mausoleum was erected for Menderes “to show respect for his political legacy” and “to emphasize unjust militarist practices targeting right-wing political parties” (Ibid.). It was a challenge to create a “memorial site” for Menderes since it was illegal “to praise a criminal” in Turkey at that time (Ibid.). For restoring the honor of Menderes, Law No. 3623 was enacted by the Turkish parliament in April 1990. Thus, his body was transferred from İmralı Island to the new mausoleum in Vatan Street with a massive demonstration (Ibid.).



Image 2.11 Adnan Menderes Mausoleum, Vatan Street, İstanbul, available at: <https://memorializeturkey.com/en/memorial/adnan-menderes-mausoleum/> (accessed: November 2020)



Image 2.12 Adnan Menderes Mausoleum, Vatan Street, İstanbul, available at: <https://memorializeturkey.com/en/memorial/adnan-menderes-mausoleum/> (accessed: November 2020)

### **3. COMPETING DISCOURSES AND CLAIMS ON YASSIADA**

This chapter deals with the complex relations between memory, heritage, and politics of identity over Yassıada. Inspired by Massey's (1995, p.188) way of thinking of places as "constantly shifting articulations of social relations through time", it brings together the competing discourses and practices of different actors that are associated with the island, enabling a relational understanding of place. The Young Civilians, representatives of the ruling Justice and Development Party, and Islands Defense are selected as the main actors of the chapter, mainly due to their ways of practicing "a sense of place" (Massey, 1991; 2005) over the island. Together with the social/political backgrounds of the actors, the chapter also provides the processes in which the actors' discourses and positions regarding the island were shaped and investigates certain shifts in these discourses and positions to show how Yassıada has become "a stage on which social processes are played out" (Heynen, 2013, p.343). In addition, the recent radical spatial transformations of Yassıada and their discursive impacts are discussed.

#### **3.1 "Never Again"**

The second half of the 20th century in Turkey may be termed as the "coup era" (Çaylı, 2014, p.13). This period was marked by a series of military interventions, including the 1960 and 1980 coup d'états, 1971, 1979, and 1997 memorandums. Under the 'guardianship of the military', in this period, "alternative memory narratives have been brutally repressed, denied or manipulated" by "one-sided and rigid conventional national memory" (Hafıza Merkezi, no date). At the commencement of the 2000s with the discourse of "post-coup democratization" (Çaylı, 2014, p.13) and in line with Turkey's bid for European Union membership, the ruling Justice and Development Party (JDP) enacted several reform packages to curtail the military power (Arınç, 2011). A new and contentious political, cultural, and symbolic space was opened up (Hafıza Merkezi, no date). "Different competing political and social groups" such as Muslim and conservative groups, feminist initiatives, Kurdish political movement, radical leftists, nationalist and secular initiatives, Alevi, Jew, and Christian communities,

LGBTQI+ movement formed the fragments of this new space (Ibid.). Including the “rights-seeking communities who identify strongly with the victims of the coup era’s atrocities” (Çaylı, 2014), these groups challenged the dominant narratives of memory of the coup era, and in a sense, post-2000’s Turkey was marked by a “memory boost” (Hafıza Merkezi, no date).

One of these groups was the Young Civilians (*Genç Siviller*). “The arrival of the Young Civilians” should be considered as a “metaphor” for the kind of change that Turkey has undergone from the post-2000s (Franklin, 2012). Began as a group of students at Middle East Technical University in 1999, the Young Civilians questioned the secular state elite and the military’s involvement in daily life (Gürpınar, 2011). As a diverse group who are “both religious and secular with a variety of political affiliations” and “drawn together by their passionate belief in democracy” (Tavernise, 2007), they provoked “normalization” by caricaturing Kemalist ideology of the guardianship with demonstrations, slogans, and humorous language (Bora, 2017, p.565). With their principal weapon, “wit”, in 2003, the group held one of their earliest protests (Tavernise, 2007). They took aim at the annual May 19 Youth and Sports Day, “which features schoolchildren marching in sports stadiums around the country” (Ibid.). In their words, “the ceremonies were far too stiff, too Soviet and, frankly, too dull, and it was a kind of Stalin festival, a dogmatic thing”. They held a press conference proposing to “rescue the festival from the stadiums” (Ibid.). An article in *Cumhuriyet* titled “Young Officers Are Concerned” addressed the Young Civilians’ proposal on May 19 ceremonies (23.05.2003, p.1). The group sarcastically posted a statement on the Internet saying that “The Young Civilians” were also concerned, and this statement brought the name “Young Civilians” to the group in 2006 (Tavernise, 2007; Gürpınar, 2011, p.135).



Image 3.1 “Young Civilians Are Concerned” written placard with the image of a red Converse shoe,<sup>6</sup> available at: <http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/gokce-aytulu/genc-siviller-konformist-1085658/> (accessed: December 2020)

In 2012, Young Civilians created the Animal Party, whose theme is to protect animal rights (Franklin, 2012). The Animal Party of Turkey organized a trip to Sivriada on June 3, 2012, to commemorate the 102nd anniversary of the Great Dog Massacre of 1910 (Agos, 04.06.2012). The members of the party erected a plaque on the island written: “In the memory of tens of thousands of dogs that were left to die on this island in 1910” (Image 3.2).

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<sup>6</sup> A red Converse shoe that “stands for a relaxed, liberalized approach to Turkey’s infamously serious and harsh political sphere” was the symbol of the Young Civilians (Genç, 2016, p.41).



Image 3.2 The plaque erected on Sivriada by members of the Animal Party, 2012, available at: <http://www.agos.com.tr/tr/yazi/1578/hayvan-partisi-insanlik-adina-kopeklerden-ozur-diledi> (accessed: December 2020)

Young Civilians also brought up the idea of a museum on Yassıada in the early 2000s. Starting from 2008 until 2013, they organized trips to the island with the slogans “Let Yassıada Be an Island of Democracy” and “Never Again<sup>7</sup>” (Sütlaş, 2009; Süvari, 2015). Yıldray Oğur (2020), one of the founders of the Young Civilians, in his article on how the idea of “Let Yassıada Be the Island of Democracy” was born says: “The island, where one of the biggest sins of the state was committed, was ignored for years. In all these years, nobody had thought of even hanging a small sign on the island for that bad memory.” In their call in 2009, the group said:

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<sup>7</sup> A slogan which “in Europe became apparent through the peace-promoting posters at the end of WWI” (*Again Never Again*, no date).

Only one year left to the 50th anniversary of the 1960 coup. We appeal to the President and Prime Minister as simple citizens who have no favorite coup, who do not want to live in a tutelary regime and side with democracy: On the 50th anniversary of the first coup d'état of the Turkish Republic, let Yassıada be a museum where we will come to terms with the coups, an institute where studies will be carried out to raise the standard of democracy, a center for civil society (...) Let Yassıada be the symbol of a new era, (...) be a Democracy Island. (Sütlaş, 2009)

Young Civilians went to the island every 27 May, organized panels and, made television programs in the abandoned gymnasium, and with Oğur's words, "they reminded Yassıada to Turkey" (Oğur, 2020). In addition to these trips, a search conference was held with a large group of famous architects, with the invitation of Young Civilians, followed by a 'Yassıada Democracy Island' project prepared and presented to the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization (Ibid.).



Image 3.3 Young Civilians hanging out "Yassıada Democracy Island" written sign on the island, 2012, available at: <https://www.haberler.com/genc-siviller-yassida-ya-demokrasi-adasi-yazili-3658518-haberi/> (accessed: December 2020)

Young Civilians sometimes have been criticized for their “one-sided” view of the issue, “just like those who see and adopt the May 27 coup as the reconstruction of democracy and freedoms and glorify this coup by stating that it was ‘different’ from the others” (Sütlaş, 2009). In 2015, through the radical change of the political atmosphere in Turkey, the “memory boost” remained under overwhelming pressure (Hafıza Merkezi, no date). Following the end of the peace process<sup>8</sup> in 2015 and the failed coup attempt in 2016, the contentious political, cultural and symbolic space opened up “led by public institutions, civil society organizations or political initiatives have been closed down” (Ibid.). This political climate had also dissolved the Young Civilians in 2017.

It can be said that the Young Civilians’ attempt to identify Yassıada is directly linked to the mobilization of a particular reading of the history of the island: The first coup d’état of the Turkish Republic, and the Yassıada trials. However, as Massey (1995) argues, the sensitivities of a progressive sense of place also involve “the strategy of *writing* a radical history” (p.190). In the case of Yassıada, that radical history may also involve the minorities who were subject to violence, such as those of the victims of the Pogrom of 6-7 September, not only the superior actors who fit in the political climate of the present. It may pay regard to multiplicity rather than majoritarianism.

### **3.2 Recent Spatial Transformations and Their Discursive Impacts**

Yassıada has undergone a radical spatial transformation in both material and discursive terms in recent years. Owned by the Treasury and designated as a Military Area, Yassıada was allocated to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 2011 by the General Directorate of National Real Estate to be used as a museum. Also, in the 1/5000 Scale Conservation Master Plan of the Adalar District, which has been approved in 2011, Yassıada was designated as First Degree Natural Protected Area, Historic Protected Area, and Third Degree Archaeological Protected Area. However, in 2012, Yassıada’s Natural and Historic Protected Area statutes were abolished, and the island was declared a Sustainable Conservation and Restricted Use Area. Then, in 2013, a revision of the

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<sup>8</sup> Officially commenced after the Newroz celebrations in 2013 in the context of the Kurdish conflict.

master plan was made to transform the island together with the neighboring Sivriada for a variety of functions, and the island was also renamed Democracy and Freedom Island. And in 2015, the groundbreaking ceremony of the project, which was carried out by the MESA Holding and prepared to function the island as a congress and tourism center with buildings such as restaurants, hotels, museums, and conference halls, was held (TMMOB Şehir Plancıları Odası İstanbul Şubesi, 2016, pp. 26-30). Finally, on the sixtieth anniversary of the first coup d'état of the Turkish Republic, on May 27th, 2020, Yassıada was inaugurated.

This recent spatial transformation process of Yassıada frequently appears in various mediums as a controversial topic among politicians, experts, bureaucrats, non-governmental organizations, and citizens. The ruling Justice and Development Party's discourses about the process are based on the memorialization of decedent Prime Minister Adnan Menderes' trials in Yassıada and May 27th, 1960, military coup d'etat. Accordingly, most of the government agencies also utter the process as a process of memorialization. On the other hand, civil initiatives, which mostly embrace islander identity, base their discourses on the destruction of natural, historical, and cultural heritage. And many professional associations (Chamber of City Planners, Turkish Archaeologists Association, et al.) mount similar arguments with them.

In 2015, with the groundbreaking ceremony held on the island through the participation of Ahmet Davutoğlu, the prime minister of the time, the discourses I briefly addressed above began to create an intense discussion on Yassıada. Now, I will first focus on these competing discourses and their claims on Yassıada, and then I will present some "ruminations" (Massey, 2005) to provide an insight into how ways of thinking and narrativizing affect the place they are engaged with (Ibid).

### **3.2.1 "Mournful island"**

In the mid-2000s, news about the situation of Yassıada began to appear in the media. The images that Cihan News Agency (*Cihan Haber Ajansı*) reporter Sertaç Dalgaldere recorded in Yassıada in 2008 caused public indignation. Served on May 21, 2008, Dalgaldere's report included the following statements:

The gymnasium in Yassıada, where Democratic Party (DP) executives were tried after the coup, fell into ruin over the years. Since the gymnasium and masonry buildings in Yassıada have been abandoned one by one, today, silence prevails on the island where left traces in the history of Turkish democracy. [...] Today, people are not living on the deserted island, where surrenders to the sounds of seagulls, and the fish breeding farm on its shore welcomes those who come to the island. [...] When the Faculty of Fisheries left the island in 1995, the lodging, dining hall, and social facilities on the island (...) became unusable due to neglect. Buildings with broken windows (...) are almost unrecognizable. (*Cihan Haber Ajansı*, 2010)

Following the news, on May 27, 2008, the Young Civilians organized a trip to the island (Chapter 3.1). And Ertuğrul Günay, Minister of Culture and Tourism of the time, announced the start of preparatory work on Yassıada (*Cihan Haber Ajansı*, 2010). Thereafter, in 2011 Yassıada was allocated to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism by the General Directorate of National Real Estate to be used as a museum.

On July 26, 2011, Minister Günay, who visited the island together with Governor Hüseyin Avni Mutlu, Mayor of İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality Kadir Topbaş, and Mayor of Islands Mustafa Farsakoğlu, made statements about Yassıada becoming a museum-island such as, “In a sense, we will make a museum of democracy here. [...] We will also make arrangements such as an area where various cultural events will be held, maybe a small accommodation facility, exhibition halls, meeting halls” (*Hürriyet*, 26.07.2011). Then, he added:

This is one of the places where the most painful and disgraceful events of our history of democracy and law occurred. [...]Yassıada and even Sivriada, in a sense, were places known as ‘Mournful Island’, because of injustices in our history. [...] These islands should be places of coming to terms with these injustices. (Ibid.)

Kadir Topbaş also said that “traces and wounds of the past” were known on the island, and it was very important for Yassıada to be an island of democracy (Ibid.). Stating that Prime Minister Erdoğan gave instructions for making the island an ‘island of democracy’, Topbaş continued:

Together with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, we want to unearth the historical artifacts from the Byzantine and Ottoman periods in Yassıada and Sivriada, and turn Yassıada into an island of democracy, so that the events of the 1960 coup will not happen again in the future. [...] It is a shame that these islands, which are an important value in such a beautiful city, remain empty. (Ibid.)

He also stated that “buildings later added on the island” would be removed, and the “symbolic structures and historical artifacts” will be preserved. Then, just as Günay did, he explained the project on Yassıada ambiguously:

We will bring a system that does not contain too many additional buildings, preserves natural beauties. [...] There are functions such as museum, culture, tourism island. The main idea regarding the project will come out with the participation of the experts and architects. [...] This island has a symbolic value. We do not want some other functions and activities that will overshadow the Island of Democracy. There are some traces here. It is enough to reveal them. [...] But of course, İstanbul has the characteristics of a country. On the other hand, we have Princes’ Islands. These islands (...) need to serve tourism in a different way. We have projects related to that. (Ibid.)

And, in 2013, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan –the prime minister of the time- declared that Yassıada was renamed Democracy and Freedom Island. He also said that the “mournful island” would become a “museum of freedom and democracy” (*Yeni Şafak*, 22.01.2013). Regarding the debates on Erdoğan’s declaration, Erdoğan Bayraktar, Minister of Environment and Urban Planning of the time, made the following statement: “Yassıada, where the decision to execute the decedent Adnan Menderes and two of his minister friends has been taken, will not be opened to construction” (*Akşam*, 20.07.2013). He stated that the project was misinterpreted by some groups as “Yassıada is being opened to tourism”. And, he added that they would not allow “construction that would hurt the memories of Adnan Menderes and his friends” (Ibid.).

On May 14, 2015, the groundbreaking ceremony of the project, which was prepared by Justice and Development Party deputy chairwoman Çiğdem Karaaslan and carried out by the MESA Holding to develop the island into a congress and tourism center with buildings such as restaurants, hotels, museums, conference halls was held (*Hürriyet Daily News*, 14.05.2015; Munyar, 2018). At the ceremony, Ahmet Davutoğlu –the

prime minister of the time- declared the future utilizations of the island, such as: “This place will be utilized for peace talks that we intermediate, democracy workshops. And as a congress center” (*Hürriyet Daily News*, 14.05.2015). He said, “a democracy museum” would be built on Yassıada to “commemorate the heroes of democracy” (Ibid.). In his speech, Davutoğlu also called upon opposition parties “to hold a symbolic assembly of the Turkish Parliament” on the island on the anniversary of the 1960 coup, “to show the entire world that nobody can ever shut down the Turkish parliament again” (Ibid.).



Image 3.4 A view of Yassıada from the boat taking the journalists to the island for the groundbreaking ceremony, 14 May 2015, available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/pg/foto-galeri/quot-demokrasi-ve-ozgurluk-adalariquot-projesi> (accessed: January 2021)



Image 3.5 A scene from the groundbreaking ceremony held in Yassıada, 14 May 2015, available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/pg/foto-galeri/quot-demokrasi-ve-ozgurluk-adalariquot-projesi> (accessed: January 2021)



Image 3.6 Ahmet Davutoğlu praying in the gymnasium in Yassıada, 14 May 2015, available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/pg/foto-galeri/quot-demokrasi-ve-ozgurluk-adalariquot-projesi> (accessed: January 2021)



Image 3.7 A scene from the groundbreaking ceremony held in Yassıada, 14 May 2015, available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/pg/foto-galeri/quot-demokrasi-ve-ozgurluk-adalariquot-projesi> (accessed: January 2021)

Although the project on Yassıada was set to be finished in February 2019, it lasted until 2020. And, on the sixtieth anniversary of the first coup d'état of the Turkish Republic, on May 27th, 2020, Yassıada was inaugurated.

Considering the discourses and statements of the members of the ruling Justice and Development Party and representatives of the government agencies, one can easily say that “the symbolic value of Adnan Menderes” (Hafıza Merkezi, no date) is very connected to the demands over Yassıada. As I mentioned in Chapter 2.3, “to restore Menderes’ honor and show respect for his political legacy”, a mausoleum was erected in 1990 (Ibid.). That mausoleum as a memorialization project “also fostered other initiatives to commemorate Adnan Menderes”, who is still a symbol for the right-wing politics in Turkey (Ibid.). To rename Yassıada as ‘Democracy and Freedom Island’ in 2013 too is another initiative of the Turkish government to commemorate Menderes.

But, of course, the discourse of “post-coup democratization” (Çaylı, 2014, p.13) of the early 2000s has paved the way for this and other initiatives. Besides Yassıada, in the political climate of the early 2000s, Turkey's other “sites of atrocity” (Ibid., p.14) were also on the agenda of the governing JDP and were subject to projects. As Çaylı states, “such sites include the Madimak Hotel where 37 were killed by arson on July 2nd,

1993; the Diyarbakir Prison where tens of Kurdish political inmates were tortured en masse over the years that followed the 1980 coup; and the recently museumified Ulucanlar Prison where key revolutionary figures from the 1970s leftist student movement were hanged” (Ibid.). But as distinguished from such sites, Yassıada is a place where victims’ legacy is claimed by the JDP. The Justice and Development Party has been “openly defending the legacy of Menderes” (Hafıza Merkezi, no date). Moreover, as Howard Eissenstat states, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan -the current President of Turkey and the leader of the JDP- believes that “it is his historic role to reassert the process Menderes started” (Yackley, 2014). The process that Menderes started was mostly about the dismantling of the “state institutions that had been used to transform society along the lines of top-down secularization, modernization, and Turkification” (Hafıza Merkezi, no date). Also, together with the military's 2007 e- memorandum<sup>9</sup>, the failed coup attempt of 2016<sup>10</sup> might be the moments “when Menderes's spirit loomed at Erdoğan's shoulder” (Yackley, 2014).

And again, considering the statements I presented above, it can be said that “museumification” stands out as a “strategy of relating to the past” (Çaylı, 2014, p.22). In a sense, museumification is “a sine qua non for the memorialization” of the 1960 coup and the ‘heroes of democracy’ (Ibid.). And, all that emphasis on Yassıada’s museumification embraces the “instrumental reason” (Horkheimer, 2012), “a type of reasoning directed towards calculating the best means to attain a given end” (Foster, 2006, p.1). The ‘project’ of a ‘place of memory’ running by a construction company is the clearest manifestation of this instrumental reason. Moreover, from the perspective of a progressive sense of place, it can be said that the JDP imposes a singular memory on the island. Closed to a multiplicity of memories and experiences, museumified Yassıada can be considered as a place where a certain history and memory are frozen.

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<sup>9</sup> The statement that General Staff released in 2007 on its website to express disapproval of plans to make Abdullah Gül the country's president.

<sup>10</sup> During the attempted coup to overthrow the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, more than 250 people were killed.

### 3.2.2 “Leave it desolate!”

The Gezi Park Resistance<sup>11</sup> in 2013 soon led to the creation of groups that advocate “the right to the city” (Lefebvre, 2016[1967] in Turkey (Zihnioğlu, 2019, p.11). Established as local forums during the resistance, some of these groups later “mobilized on issues that touch upon people’s everyday lives” and focused on local problems by their works (Ibid.). Also, in 2014 larger-scale initiatives such as ‘City Defenses’<sup>12</sup> were established (Ibid.). One of them was the Islands Defense (*Adalar Savunması*), an organized network of the forums, initiatives, volunteers from the islands of Turkey (Büyükada, Heybeliada, Burgazada, Kınalıada, Gökçeada, and Bozcaada) and of the professional chambers and the representatives of the municipalities. As stated in their press conference, Islands Defense aims to “preserve the cultural and historical richness of the islands, to defend the nature and the people who are a part of it, and to prevent the irreversible destruction of the islands which have a unique ecosystem under the pretext of tourism and development” (Adalar Savunması, 2014). And Yassıada, together with the neighboring Sivriada, has long been on the agenda of the group. In the wake of the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization revising master plans for Yassıada and Sivriada, demonstrations were organized in both islands in July 2013 with the call of forums of the Princes’ Islands. After the press release in Sivriada, a forum was held in the abandoned gymnasium in Yassıada where Democrat Party members were tried. With the slogans of “Leave It Desolate!”, “Don’t Touch My Island!”, people gathering in the forum opposed the zoning changes that allow for high-density construction on Yassıada and Sivriada (*Dokuz Ada Bir Deniz*, 21.07.2013). Following these demonstrations, petitions containing objections to the plans were collected by the people of the Adalar and submitted to the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization (Çankaya, 2016, p.60).

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<sup>11</sup> In May 2013, it started as a sit-in protest of a group of activists at Gezi Park in İstanbul’s Taksim Square. Protesting the Turkish government’s plans to demolish the park, the activists were evicted from the park with the excessive use of police force. This sparked “an unprecedented wave of mass demonstrations” and “around 3 million people took to the streets across Turkey over a three-week period to protest a wide range of concerns” (Zihnioğlu, 2019, p.11).

<sup>12</sup> I personally disapprove of the use of the military term “defense” by groups working on the basis of the right to the city.



Image 3.8 “Leave it desolate” written banner from the demonstration, 21 July 2013, available at: <http://dokuzadabirdeniz.com/?p=1454> (accessed: December 2020)



Image 3.9 A scene from the forum held in the abandoned gymnasium of Yassıada, 21 July 2013, available at: <http://dokuzadabirdeniz.com/?p=1454> (accessed: December 2020)

On December 27, 2014, the Islands Defense conducted an observation trip to Yassıada and Sivriada. The group shared the notes taken during the trip with the public. Here, I present part of the notes:

Natural life continues to reign in all its glory on both islands. [...] A small cat population continues to live in Sivriada, as we have witnessed in our trips in previous years and months. Sivriada has turned into a giant field of fennel in this season. We came across various mushrooms as well as fennel. The various trees we planted in the pier area of the island, in the demonstration we organized last year, are also growing. Archaeological excavations should be started as soon as possible in the Byzantine monastery, chapel walls, and cistern areas on the island. To date, no archaeological work has been initiated in Sivriada or Yassıada, except for a survey conducted in the late 1990s. We decided to prioritize this issue and work to support archaeological studies on these islands. [...] Nature continues to take back Yassıada, where there has been no permanent settlement since 1995. Against those who say “Yassıada is a dead island”, “There is no life there”, “Let Yassıada be an island of democracy, be a congress center, be full of marinas and restaurants”, nature and diversity flourish in every corner of Yassıada. Species such as pistachio pine, yellow and red pine, olive and fig, which were brought to Yassıada in the past, are becoming the local trees of the island. The southern and eastern slopes of the island are covered with blackberry and rosehip bushes that continue to bear fruit this season. The cisterns in the middle of Yassıada, one of the stopover sites of the migratory birds in Marmara, and the Byzantine remains on the northern slopes are still waiting to be investigated. The Byzantine structures we know from historical records have not been excavated yet. [...] Yassıada and Sivriada, where are indispensable for the ecosystem of Princes’ Islands and Marmara, fish spawning areas, and bird migration, call out once again to all the people of Marmara through us: Leave It Desolate! (Dokuz Ada Bir Deniz, 2014)



Image 3.10 A view from the observation trip at Yassıada, 27 December 2014, available at: <http://dokuzadabirdeniz.com/?p=1471> (accessed: December 2020)



Image 3.11 A view from the observation trip at Yassıada, 27 December 2014, available at: <http://dokuzadabirdeniz.com/?p=1471> (accessed: December 2020)



Image 3.12 Archaeological remains from the observation trip, 27 December 2014, available at: <http://dokuzadabirdeniz.com/?p=1471> (accessed: December 2020)

On May 14, 2015, the Islands Defense held a press release in front of the boat that took the journalists to Yassiada for the groundbreaking ceremony on the island. The group said:

Today, on the pretext of the anniversary of the election that the Democratic Party won on May 14, 1950, the government is planning a rushed groundbreaking ceremony and is seeking political rents from Yassıada. Those who make preparations to inaugurate Yassıada as Democracy and Freedom Island, where Adnan Menderes and his comrades were tried, as a part of the so-called democracy love, are destroying the nature and culture of the Princes' Islands and İstanbul once again. [...] A construction project, which is stated to have reached 130 million dollars through TOBB, is being tendered to construction companies such as MESA and ENKA. Under the pretense of keeping the memory of Menderes and his comrades' alive, our islands are being filled up with 5-star hotels, marinas, restaurants, patisseries, cafeterias, night clubs, hairdressers, exhibition halls, conference halls, and car parks. (Dokuz Ada Bir Deniz, 2015a)

On July 13, 2015, the Turkish Archaeologists Association too made a statement regarding construction works started on Yassıada: “In the face of political rent and construction projects, it is ethically unacceptable to ignore the conservation legislation and the scientific criteria. Together with its natural and historical riches, Yassıada should have an important place in the social memory also with the 1960 executions.”<sup>13</sup> (Dokuz Ada Bir Deniz, 2015b)

And on August 3, 2015, the Islands Defense organized another trip to Yassıada. Many council members of İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality, deputies, experts from the Chamber of Architects, Chamber of City Planners, Archaeologists Association, lawyers, and press members also attended the trip. The construction work in Yassıada was observed and photographed on site. During the trip, it was understood that the Byzantine Dungeons were subject to treasure hunting and partially collapsed, the vegetation on the island became unrecognizable, some reinforced concrete structures were demolished, and there was no healthy information sharing and working order in the construction area (Dokuz Ada Bir Deniz, 2015c; TMMOB Şehir Plancıları Odası İstanbul Şubesi, 2016, p.30).

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<sup>13</sup> In this statement, the Turkish Archaeologists Association incorrectly claims that Adnan Menderes, Fatih Rüştü Zorlu, and Hasan Polatkan had been executed in Yassıada.



Image 3.13 A scene from the trip organized by the Islands Defense, 3 August 2015, at Yassıada, available at: <http://dokuzadabirdeniz.com/?p=1379> (accessed: December 2020)



Image 3.14 A scene from the trip organized by the Islands Defense, 3 August 2015, at Yassıada, available at: <http://dokuzadabirdeniz.com/?p=1379> (accessed: December 2020)

Thereupon, the Islands Defense released a statement titled “We Saw the Murder in Yassıada!”:

We saw the murder in Yassıada! [...] You added a new one to the crimes you committed: You started to destroy Yassıada. You have destroyed the natural life, trees, forest, paths, bird nests, and fish eggs in Yassıada. You brought one of the most valuable natural habitats of Marmara and İstanbul to the brink of extinction. (Dokuz Ada Bir Deniz, 2015c)

It can be said that the discourses of the Islands Defense that I cited above express a reaction against the ecological destruction of Yassıada and reflect the group’s “sense of place” (Massey, 1991). The article of Ömer Süvari (2015), one of the representatives of the group, is important in presenting the political-economic context of this reaction and sense that developed over Yassıada. In his article, Süvari claims that the basis of the projects regarding Yassıada started to form in the early 2000s to a great extent. According to Süvari, in this period, “the economic value” of the Princes’ Islands came to the fore. And, encouraging rent-seeking, the Justice and Development Party, “the new representative of the neoliberal transformation”, focused on the “natural, cultural and historical riches” of the Islands. In this process, Yassıada was high on the agenda of the party as “a productive investment area” together with its symbolic meanings (Ibid.). Within this context, Süvari (2015) considers the proposals to build a “museum of democracy” on Yassıada merely as an “aesthetic” excuse for the development of the highly desirable real estate on the island.

### **3.3 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I described three prominent actors who have been associated with the island since Yassıada began to undergo a spatial transformation in both material and discursive terms in the early 2000s: The Young Civilians, representatives of the ruling Justice and Development Party, and the Islands Defense. I examined actors’ social/political backgrounds and claims and positions regarding the island in consideration of their prominent discourses that are respectively “Never Again”, “Mournful Island”, and “Leave It Desolate”. Now, I want to discuss these actors’ competing discourses, claims, and positions over Yassıada.

First, the Young Civilians. Adopting a discourse of coming to terms with the coup era of Turkey, the group brought up the idea of a museum on Yassıada in the early 2000s. However, the group kept quiet when the island was zoned for construction with tourism and cultural facility functions in 2013. This may indicate that the group approves the top-down planning process implemented by the government. Or, the group who went to the island every 27 May with a mission to remind Turkey Yassıada and its difficult memory may have left the memorialization process of the island to the investors. In either case, it can be said that the Young Civilians, far from taking a progressive political stance, solely made Yassıada a symbolic stage of their political performances in a certain historical moment, i.e., in the post-coup democratization era of Turkey.

Second, the representatives of the ruling Justice and Development Party. It would not be wrong to say that the ruling Justice and Development Party, as the *only* decision-maker, played the most decisive role in Yassıada's transformation. Adopting a similar discourse with the Young Civilians, the ruling JDP directly embraces the symbolic value of Adnan Menderes and his political legacy regarding its claims about Yassıada. And correspondingly, they have made Yassıada a symbolic stage of their political performances - just as the Young Civilians did. They also publicized the project of a 'museum of democracy and freedom' as an initiative to memorialize decedent Prime Minister Adnan Menderes' trials in Yassıada and the 1960 military coup d'etat. As mentioned in Chapter 3.2.1, in JDP's discourses, museumification stands out as an absolute strategy for the memorialization process. At this point, it would be useful to consider Agamben's (2007) definition of "museification": "The impossibility of using has its emblematic place in the Museum. (...) everything today can become a Museum, because this term simply designates the exhibition of an impossibility of using, of dwelling, of experiencing" (Ibid. pp. 83-84). So, what about "museification" of Yassıada? Considering the discourses and claims of the JDP, it can be said that the party imposes a singular memory on the island. Closed to a multiplicity of memories and experiences, museumified Yassıada can be considered as a place where a certain history and memory are frozen.

And finally, the Islands Defense. First of all, the group is an actor involved in the environmental struggle in Turkey. Struggling to protect the cultural and historical

richness of the Princes' Islands, the group expresses a reaction against the transformation of Yassiada, i.e., the ecological destruction of the island. From their point of view, Yassiada is a unique ecosystem with its natural, cultural, and archaeological resources. However, considering their discourses and claims, it is as if the island has nothing to do with a difficult past. In a sense, by only appropriating the environmental assets of the island, the Islands Defense competes against the JDP and suppresses the difficult memory of Yassiada. And the discourse of "Leave It Desolate" itself is problematic since it evokes the impossibility of experiencing.

All these discourses, claims, and positions of the Young Civilians, representatives of the ruling Justice and Development Party, and the Islands Defense try to characterize and define Yassiada. At this point, it would be useful to consider Massey's (1995) notion of "envelopes of space-time", which refers to specific periods of time that supposedly define a place's essential character (p.188). As she points at, different groups may conflict on the basis of 'envelopes of space-time' to characterize and define a place. In the case of Yassiada, we have three prominent actors trying to fix these envelopes as static to legitimize their senses of place. While the Young Civilians and the representatives of the ruling Justice and Development Party seal Yassiada up into the 'sacred political memory' envelope of space-time, the Islands Defense seals it into the 'natural, historical site of heritage' envelope. However, a progressive sense of place, which avoids homogenizing the diversity and heterogeneity of place (Massey, 1991), could have provided a forum for negotiations across the multiple identities of Yassiada. Now, paying regard to these sensitivities of a progressive sense of place, I will focus on the museumified Yassiada, i.e., Democracy and Freedom Island.

#### 4. MEMORIALIZATION IN YASSIADA

Paul Connerton (1989; 2009; 2011) draws attention to the increasing attention to memory studies since the 1980s. He explains this “obsession with memory studies” with regard to a shift in interest from primarily individual memory to cultural memory. According to him, the confluence of three factors led to this shift: the long shadow of World War II; the transitional justice, i.e., the process of examining difficult pasts and memories of countries that have recently moved toward a more democratic form of government from a totalitarian or authoritarian past; and finally the process of decolonization which had repercussions both for colonizing powers and previously colonized powers (Connerton, 2011).

Likewise, historian Jay Winter (2000), too, dwells on this increasing attention to memory studies in the late twentieth century, and to express this particular attention, he uses the term “memory boom”. As he explains, the term is related to the diverse political and social groups claiming rights for a public representation of their memories, pasts, and identities (Ibid.).

The post-coup era of Turkey may be considered a transitional justice process. As discussed in Chapter 3.1, with the discourse of post-coup democratization, a memory boom also marked post-2000’s Turkey. Challenging the dominant narratives of memory of the coup era of Turkey, rights-seeking communities have paved the way for several memorialization initiatives. In this political climate, Yassıada was on the agenda of the governing JDP together with the other sites of the atrocity of Turkey. And following its contentious memorialization process, on the sixtieth anniversary of the first coup d’état of the Turkish Republic, Yassıada was inaugurated as a congress center and open-air museum under the name Democracy and Freedom Island. During the process, the view of the island also changed considerably, and the project has taken a lot of criticism for causing environmental destruction.



Image 4.1 A view of Yassıada before the project started, available at: <http://www.diken.com.tr/yassiadaya-demokrasi-doga-katliamiyla-gelmis-agaclar-kesilip-beton-ada-yapilmis/> (accessed: February 2021)

In this chapter, I will first briefly evaluate the project realized in Yassıada (or, with its new name, Democracy and Freedom Island) from an architectural perspective. Later, I will focus on the ways in which Democracy and Freedom Island relate to the past.

## 4.1 “Democracy and Freedom Island”

### 4.1.1 An architectural overview: “anything goes”

İhsan Bilgin (2020) examines the project on Yassıada with reference to the postmodern credo of “anything goes”<sup>14</sup>. He claims that the project adopts a ‘cynical’ approach to architecture. It is possible to follow the traces of that cynical approach through images from the island. Firstly, as can be seen in most of the “cynical projects produced with the cut and paste technique”, the project focus on the literal meaning of the word ‘flat’<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> In Terry Smiths’s words, “the postmodern idea of total fragmentation” (Williams, 2014, p.364).

<sup>15</sup> Means ‘Yassı’ in Turkish. Yassıada can be translated into English as Flat Island.

(Ibid.): The flat ground obtained by placing a large circular ground in the middle of Yassıada transforms into the roof of the large foyer below. And the meeting halls enclosing the circular flat ground turn the inside of the ground into another foyer (Image 4.2; 4.3; 4.4).



Image 4.2 The project prepared by Çiğdem Karaaslan, available at: <https://serbestiyet.com/yazarlar/yassiada-projesinin-bastirmayi-surdurdugu-siyasi-hatira-36628/> (accessed: February 2021)



Image 4.3 A view of Yassıada in 2017, available at: <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/yassiadadaki-degisim-40645251> (accessed: January 2021)



Image 4.4 A view of Yassıada in 2019, available at: <https://t24.com.tr/haber/demokrasi-ve-ozgurlukler-adasi-olacak-yassiyada-beton-adasi-oldu,822692> (accessed: February 2021)

The island's pier and dock are equipped with large and small buildings. And the famous sports hall of the Yassıada trials has been transformed into a brand new hall (Image 4.5).



Image 4.5 A view of Yassıada in 2019, available at: <https://kuzeyormanlari.org/2019/05/24/yassıada-apartman-oldu/> (accessed: January 2021)

Bilgin (2020) also makes an analogy between Democracy and Freedom Island and ‘hedonistic’ hotels on the Antalya coastline such as Kremlin Palace and Topkapı Palace in terms of “unprincipled agglomeration of images”. These hotels that can be interpreted as “a by-product of a concern imposed on tourism in Turkey, a concern for an exotic and orientalist image” (Kılıçkırın, 1999, p.100) spread over large parcels on the Antalya coast. However, it seems like the project on Yassıada outgrows the surface area of the tiny island of the Sea of Marmara. Nevertheless, the project includes convention facilities to a large extent. But these convention facilities neither justify the project nor meet the needs of the city of İstanbul. Because, in the words of Bilgin (2020), İstanbul has already turned into a “garbage dump of convention centers” in recent years.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Here, Bilgin mentions İstanbul Lütfi Kırdar International Convention and Exhibition Center (ICEC) and Haliç Congress Center. The ICEC operated as İstanbul Sports and Exhibition Hall between 1948-1988. After Habitat II Summit in İstanbul in 1996, it started to serve the meeting and convention industry. And, in 1998, Sütluçe Slaughterhouse was demolished on the basis that “interior design of the historic building failed to match the construction program projected by the contractor” and it was replaced with Haliç Congress Center (Küçük, 2015). Both İstanbul Sports and Exhibition Hall and Sütluçe Slaughterhouse were symbols of the modernization of the city of İstanbul. The transformation process of both buildings is controversial in terms of conservation practices.

And undoubtedly, considering the land qualities of Yassıada, it will come to the fore how to establish an architectural relationship with a rocky land. At this point, Bilgin (2020) refers to Adalberto Libera's Casa Malaparte, one of the finest examples of architecture in a rocky land, with the title "the poetic comfort of the rock". He then emphasizes that the island of Capri as a whole with its castle, neighborhoods, villages, squares, and monasteries is proof that it can also be built and lived on the rock. However, considering the images from Democracy and Freedom Island, one might argue that this rocky island lacks any poetic feeling.



Image 4.6 A view of 'Democracy and Freedom Island', circa May 2020, available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/pg/foto-galeri/demokrasi-ve-ozgurlukler-adasi-acilisa-hazir> (photograph: Onur Çoban ) (accessed: January 2021)



Image 4.7 A view of 'Democracy and Freedom Island', circa May 2020, available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/pg/foto-galeri/demokrasi-ve-ozgurlukler-adasi-acilisa-hazir> (photograph: Onur Çoban ) (accessed: January 2021)



Image 4.8 A view of 'Democracy and Freedom Island', circa May 2020, available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/pg/foto-galeri/demokrasi-ve-ozgurlukler-adasi-acilisa-hazir> (photograph: Onur Çoban ) (accessed: January 2021)



Image 4.9 A view of ‘Democracy and Freedom Island’, circa May 2020. On the front Democracy Lighthouse, available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/pg/foto-galeri/demokrasi-ve-ozgurlukler-adasi-acilisa-hazir> (photograph: Onur Çoban ) (accessed: January 2021)

Nevertheless, Yassıada has a significant political memory that will prevent it from being shaped by haphazard architectural fantasies. I argue that this is the crucial point which the project missed.

#### **4.1.2 Confronting the past through museums?**

In his article, Bilgin (2020) comments on how a “democracy project” could deal with the difficult past of Yassıada. According to him, that democracy project could start by “preserving all its material elements, large and small, that would keep the traumatic political memory of the island alive”. And these material elements should be evaluated with regard to their “power to indicate what they remind”, rather than their “vital/cultural quality” (Ibid.). Although Bilgin (2020) mostly interprets this power through materiality, it is obvious that artistic, pedagogical, and collective practices also play an important role in the field of memory. Now, within the context of these practices, I want to focus on the ways in which ‘Democracy and Freedom Island’ relate to the past.

In Democracy and Freedom Island, the gymnasium where Yassıada trials were held has been converted into 27 May Museum “in order to narrate to the next generations and the world the darkest periods in the history of the island” (Directorate of Communications, 2020). The exhibition in the museum contains a summary of the case files and the decisions made. The museum also includes the replicas of the defendants’ chairs and of the microphones used during the trial. Below the article “Justice is the Basis of Property” are the wax sculptures of the Supreme Court of Justice President Salim Başol, Attorney General Altay Ömer Egesel, and the members of the council. The documentary *Dünden Bugüne Yassıada*, which tells about what happened in Turkish political history and Yassıada at that time, is also shown in the museum (*euronews*, 27.05.2020).



Image 4.10 27 May Museum, Democracy and Freedom Island, available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/pg/foto-galeri/demokrasi-ve-ozgurlukler-adasi-acilisa-hazir> (photograph: Onur Çoban) (accessed: February 2021)



Image 4.11 The exhibition in the 27 May Museum, consisting of the summary of the case files and the decisions made. Also the defendants' chairs, in the middle, available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/pg/foto-galeri/demokrasi-ve-ozgurlukler-adasi-acilisa-hazir> (photograph: Onur Çoban) (accessed: February 2021)



Image 4.12 Wax sculptures of the members of the Supreme Court of Justice, 27 May Museum, available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/pg/foto-galeri/demokrasi-ve-ozgurlukler-adasi-acilisa-hazir> (photograph: Onur Çoban) (accessed: February 2021)



Image 4.13 Wax sculptures of the defendants, 27 May Museum, available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/pg/foto-galeri/demokrasi-ve-ozgurlukler-adasi-acilisa-hazir> (photograph: Onur Çoban) (accessed: February 2021)

The building, which was used as the officers' dormitory at the time of the trials, has been converted into the Democracy and Liberties Museum, "where the world's experience of democracy and the history of human rights is conveyed" (Directorate of Communications, 2020). Inside this museum, there is a replica of the house where Adnan Menderes was born in Aydın. In 'Aydın House', there is a bedroom, saloon, and kitchen. The plane crash that Adnan Menderes experienced in London on February 17, 1959, is also described in a room with a replica of the plane wreck. On the upper floor of the museum is Adnan Menderes's prison room, including replicas of the bed, table, chair, and some other objects. On this floor, there are also rooms named *Özlem* (*Longing*), *Sessizlik-İntihar* (*Silence-Suicide*), *Çaresizlik-Halüsinasyon* (*Desperation-Hallucination*), *Ölüm Korkusu* (*Fear of Death*), *Dava Arkadaşları* (*Comrades*) and *Dava Devam Ediyor* (*The Case Continues*) (euronews, 27.05.2020).



Image 4.14 Bedroom of the Aydın House, Democracy and Liberties Museum, available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/pg/foto-galeri/demokrasi-ve-ozgurlukler-adasi-acilisa-hazir> (photograph: Onur Çoban) (accessed: February 2021)



Image 4.15 The replica of a plane wreck describing the crash that Adnan Menderes experienced in London, Democracy and Liberties Museum, available at: <https://outdoorfactory.com.tr/portfolio/yassiada-freedom-and-democracy-museum-2/> (accessed: February 2021)



Image 4.16 Prison room of Adnan Menderes, Democracy and Liberties Museum, available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/pg/foto-galeri/demokrasi-ve-ozgurlukler-adasi-acilisa-hazir> (photograph: Onur Çoban) (accessed: February 2021)



Image 4.17 Wax sculpture of Adnan Menderes, Democracy and Liberties Museum, available at: <https://outdoorfactory.com.tr/portfolio/yassiada-freedom-and-democracy-museum-2/> (accessed: February 2021)

There is also an open-air museum on the island. Various sculptures and objects are exhibited in open spaces. One of them is the suitcase replicas of that period placed on a wall with an aim to represent 592 members of parliament who were trialed in Yassıada (Ibid.). Besides, there is a wax sculpture of Henry Bulwer, the British Ambassador to İstanbul of the time, who bought the island in 1859. Another sculpture is the *Ulaşamayanlar*, based on letters that could not reach the addressee because of censorship imposed during the trials. The sculpture consists of letters surrounded by barbed wire and a large quill (Ibid.). The open-air exhibition *Karanlıktan Aydınlığa* provides the history of the island from past to present with texts and visuals. Next to some objects in the open area, there are also Hadiths mounted on the wall (Ibid.).



Image 4.18 Suitcase replicas representing 592 members of parliament who trialed in Yassıada, Democracy and Freedom Island, available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/pg/foto-galeri/demokrasi-ve-ozgurlukler-adasi-acilisa-hazir> (photograph: Onur Çoban) (accessed: February 2021)



Image 4.19 Wax sculpture of Sir Henry Bulwer sitting on the bench with a pen in his hand, Democracy and Freedom Island, available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/pg/foto-galeri/demokrasi-ve-ozgurlukler-adasi-acilisa-hazir> (photograph: Onur Çoban) (accessed: February 2021)



Image 4.20 *Ulaşamayanlar*, a sculpture based on letters that could not reach the addressee due to censorship, Democracy and Freedom Island, available at: <https://outdoorfactory.com.tr/portfolio/yassiada-freedom-and-democracy-museum-2/> (accessed: February 2021)



Image 4.21 The open-air exhibition providing the history of the island with text and visuals, Democracy and Freedom Island, available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/pg/foto-galeri/demokrasi-ve-ozgurlukler-adasi-acilisa-hazir> (photograph: Onur Çoban) (accessed: February 2021)

What do all those “special artistic exhibition areas” which was created by “blending the modern understanding of museology with our *own* culture” tell us (NTV, 29.05.2020)? First of all, it is useful to keep in mind that Democracy and Freedom Island is a state project since President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is recognized as the originator of the project (Ibid.). This fact raises questions about the decision-making processes during the design and implementation of the project. The only information available about these processes is that Outdoor Factory<sup>17</sup> “created the concept, directed the interior design, produced monuments, 3D installations, furniture” in Democracy and Freedom Island.<sup>18</sup> Although the events Yassıada has borne witness exist in the collective memory, it seems that during the memorialization or rather museumification process, neither public-

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<sup>17</sup> A private company that produces 3D advertisement visuals of corporate companies. As cited in their website, the company's areas of expertise are design, theme park, museum, dummy production, distribution, custom project (Outdoor Factory). <http://acikhavafabrikasi.com/home> (Accessed: May 2021)

<sup>18</sup> <https://outdoorfactory.com.tr/portfolio/yassiyada-freedom-and-democracy-museum-2/> (Accessed: March 2021)

official bodies nor private-commercial ventures did not take into consideration the wide range of meanings Yassıada conveys for different actors.

Second, as can be seen from the images given above, ‘special artistic exhibitions’ on the island mainly consist of wax sculptures, replicas of various objects, photographs, and informative signs. The museums are extremely documentary and didactic, and there is extreme symbolism in their articulation. Abstract images or ideas are very exceptional. In a sense, there are no differences between the real and the symbolic. In relation to this, Nora Tataryan (2020), with reference to Rancière (2004), mentions the “capacity of art to create a crisis in given regimes of truth”. It can be said that artistic interventions at Democracy and Freedom Island have nothing to do with creating a crisis. Because, here, the images allow for neither “connotations” nor “indirect” ones (Tataryan, 2020). Umberto Eco’s (1989) arguments on the ‘open work’ also bring a similar approach to those of Rancière’s. In his book called ‘The Open Work’, Eco refers to the ability of the work of art “to transfer different meanings each time”, in other words, its openness (Eco, 1989, pp. 195-196, cited in Kılıçkiran, 1996, p.11). He emphasizes “the necessity of the addressee’s creative involvement in the message that the work of art gives to herself” (Ibid.). In this sense, the artistic interventions at the island may be considered as ‘closed’ works. They lack the poetic function of art, which “brings an unlimited richness of meaning in the creation of it” (Ibid.).

It is also significant to consider Democracy and Freedom Island in terms of “memory wars” (Çınar, 2020) in Turkey. As a struggle to dominate social memory, memory wars “manifests itself in architecture, scales of the buildings, naming places, national holidays and ceremonies”. And the first stage in the JDP’s struggle was to revive an alternative “counter-memory” to the Kemalist memory (Ibid.). In Çınar’s terms, “counter-memory is the ‘interfered memory’ of the others who are wanted to be ignored or marginalized within the nation-state’s homogeneity discourse” (2020, p.39). And Bora (2020) states that as well as to remember and remind, “cursing to those who caused the forgetting, cursing to politics of forgetting” are essential parts of this counter-memory practice. Within the memory policy and counter-memory practices of the JDP, there is a “strong narrative of resentment” that the republican ideology, within the framework of westernizing policies, made *us* forget ‘the real culture’ and erased ‘the

real national memory' (Ibid.). In a sense, the effort 'to restore memory' develops with a sense of revenge, of resentment. Handling the May 27 coup in this context, Bora (2020) states that the May 27 coup is one of the critical issues for counter-memory since it is "the first founding coup" that represents the "threat of an eternal coup". To consider how the JDP claims Yassıada's victims' legacy and how May 27 coup was specifically 'remembered' when the 2013 Gezi Protests had been interpreted by the government as a kind of coup attempt corroborate Bora's arguments. In this regard, one may argue that Democracy and Freedom Island is one of the embodiments of the counter-memory of the JDP.



## **5. CONFRONTING DIFFICULT PASTS: CASES OF SPATIAL PRACTICE**

In this chapter, I will discuss a number of spatial practices of memorialization from Turkey and the world in order to draw attention to alternative ways of memorialization beyond single-sighted approaches to the history and identity of place. Considering memorialization as a means of presenting and confronting difficult pasts, I include diverse cases of memorialization practices ranging from memorials, museums, and sites of memory to pedagogic and educational activities and exhibitions. These are, respectively, the Berlin Wall, Stasi Museum on Normannenstrasse, 23.5 Hrant Dink Site of Memory, İstanbul Women's Museum's exhibition *unEXPOSED?*, and Karakutu Memory Walks. Through these cases, I aim to reflect on different methods and approaches to memorialization and confronting difficult pasts and shed light on sensitivities of a progressive sense of place. This, I believe, might pave the way for a more critical look at the ways in which Democracy and Freedom Island relate to the past of Yassıada.

### **5.1 Architectural and Artistic Interventions: Berlin Wall**

After the end of the Second World War, Germany was divided into two blocs in the West and East as “an unintentional outcome of the emerging Cold War” (Fulbrook, 2000; 2004, cited in Viol, 2016, p.55): The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Whereas the FRG was a parliamentary democracy with a capitalist economic system, the GDR was a Marxist–Leninist socialist republic. As a result, Germany became the “focus of an ideological and economic battle of the opposing systems of the Cold War” (Flemming and Koch, 2008, cited in Viol, 2016, p.56).

The Berlin Wall, a 155-kilometer-long guarded border of concrete and barbed wire, was erected in 1961 by the GDR to prevent mass emigration from the Eastern Bloc to the West and “avoid economic collapse which threatened the GDR’s existence” (Viol, 2016, pp. 56-57). The GDR border guards were ordered to shoot escapees “if necessary” and along the Berlin Wall, at least 136 people were killed or died (Ibid., p.57). A series of large-scale protest demonstrations and subsequent political changes lead to the opening of the borders and the fall of the Berlin Wall on the evening of 9th November 1989. And the following year, the East German Border Troops officially began dismantling the Wall.

The physical borders in Berlin, one of the most politically potent borders in the world, might have disappeared, but in Barthel’s words, “traces of the Berlin Wall are embedded in the urban mental DNA of the city” (2017, p.284). And the question of “how to remember the Wall and the division of Berlin” is on the agenda for the local debates since the Wall’s construction in 1961 (Ibid.). A general public debate for memorializing the Wall started in the early 1990s. The federal government launched the first call for creating ‘a national wall memorial’ (Teutsch 2013, cited in Barthel, 2017, p.285). A result of this call is the Berlin Wall Memorial on Bernauer Strasse, which was opened in 1998.

Bernauer Strasse is a symbol for the division of the city and an iconic representation for escapes from the windows of the houses in East Berlin to down to the street, which was in West Berlin. After the Wall had been demolished in 1990, the public actors took the decision to turn the area around the street into the ‘central wall memorial’ (Barthel, 2017, p.289). In 1994, a public competition on the architectural and artistic concepts of the memorial was coordinated by the Deutsches Historisches Museum (German Historical Museum) on behalf of the federal government. The architects Kohlhoff & Kohlhoff won the competition. They created the architectonical frame for the first stage of the memorial site. This stage comprising a 70 m long original preserved wall strip and a documentation center, was completed in 1998. The German state financed the construction, and the Berlin Senate covered the operational costs. The exhibition was curated by the Berlin Wall Foundation, a public body responsible for the quality of research, didactic concepts, and documentation at the site (Ibid., p.290). Following the

public debates on the extension of the site, the Berlin Senate published a Masterplan to Preserve the Memory of the Berlin Wall in 2006. In 2007, Berlin-based architectural offices Sinai, ON architektur and Mola+Winkelmüller won the international competition for the extension. Between 2009 and 2014, a visitor center and *Window of Remembrance* were opened on the site, and a 1.4 km long open-air exhibition became accessible. The site was integrated into the public space and divided into four areas dedicated to different narratives: “The Wall and the Death Strip; The Destruction of the City, Building the Wall, Everyday life at the Wall” (Ibid.).



Image 5.1 Memorial grounds on Bernauer Strasse, available at: <https://www.berlin.de/mauer/en/sites/commemorative-sites/berlin-wall-memorial/> (accessed: April 2021)



Image 5.2 Berlin Wall Memorial, available at:  
<https://www.berlin.de/mauer/en/sites/commemorative-sites/berlin-wall-memorial/> (accessed: April 2021)



Image 5.3 Berlin Wall documentation center, available at:  
<https://www.berlin.de/mauer/en/sites/commemorative-sites/berlin-wall-memorial/> (accessed: April 2021)



Image 5.4 The visitor center, available at: <https://www.berlin.de/mauer/en/sites/commemorative-sites/berlin-wall-memorial/> (accessed: April 2021)



Image 5.5 The Window of Remembrance, a memorial to the victims of the Berlin Wall, available at: <https://withberlinlove.com/2012/04/09/gedenkstaeue-berliner-mauer-berlin-wall-memorial/> (accessed: April 2021)

The memorial concept of the site is based on original relics and traces of the wall, thus gives a feeling of ‘authenticity’. With the idea of ‘archeological show-casing’, all remains and relics along the former border strip have been examined, documented, and described (Ibid., p.291). Accordingly, Barthel (2017) argues that the interventions on the memorial site were close to Lowenthal’s (1998) ‘history’ concept, which was a traditional, research, and didactic-oriented approach to the past (Ibid.).

In his article, with a specific concern regarding the relationship between materiality and memory, Bilgin (2020) reviews Berlin Wall and says: “if the remnants of the Berlin Wall had not been preserved together with the graffiti on it (...), it would not have the power to represent the city experience that Berliners lived until the 90s”. As regards the Berlin Wall, besides the materiality’s role, the artistic interventions concerning memory are also considerable: To commemorate the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the public-private agency Kulturprojekte Berlin (Berlin Cultural Projects) commissioned interaction designers WHITEvoid and film studio bauderfilm (Howarth, 2014). From 7th to 9th November 2014, city-wide light art installation Lichtgrenze, or ‘border of light’, followed the path once occupied by the Berlin Wall that separated West and East Berlin from 1961 until 1989, abstractly reconstructing the Wall. Spherical lights at the same height as the Berlin Wall were raised. The installation that comprises more than 8 thousand LED balloons traced a 15-kilometer stretch of the more than 140 kilometers long structure that circled the western half of the city, cut it off from its land connections with East Germany, as the Wall once did (Ibid.).



Image 5.6 Visualisation of the *Lichtgrenze*, Berlin, Germany, 2014. Copyright Kulturprojekte Berlin, WHITEvoid and bauderfilm, available at: <https://www.whitevoid.com/lichtgrenze/> (photograph: Ralph Larmann) (accessed: February 2021)



Image 5.7 Visualisation of the *Lichtgrenze*, Berlin, Germany, 2014. Copyright Kulturprojekte Berlin, WHITEvoid and bauderfilm, available at: <https://www.whitevoid.com/lichtgrenze/> (photograph: Ralph Larmann) (accessed: February 2021)



Image 5.8 Visualisation of the *Lichtgrenze*, Berlin, Germany, 2014. Copyright Kulturprojekte Berlin, WHITEvoid and bauderfilm, available at: <https://www.whitevoid.com/lichtgrenze/> (photograph: Andreas Rentsch) (accessed: February 2021)



Image 5.9 Visualisation of the *Lichtgrenze*, Berlin, Germany, 2014. Copyright Kulturprojekte Berlin, WHITEvoid and bauderfilm, available at: <https://www.dezeen.com/2014/10/27/berlin-wall-fall-25th-anniversary-lichtgrenze-illuminated-balloons-installation/> (accessed: February 2021)

The case of the Berlin Wall exhibits the roles of public actors in the memorialization processes in terms of opening space for participation and providing opportunities to discuss, experiment, adapt, and transform collective memory and imaginations of place by means of architectural and artistic interventions.

## **5.2 Authenticity of Place: The Stasi Museum on Normannenstrasse**

The Ministry for State Security of the GDR, broadly known as Stasi, was in charge of domestic political surveillance, intelligence gathering, and foreign espionage. The Stasi spied on almost every aspect of East Germans' daily lives through a vast network of informants to manipulate and control the population. During its existence, it arrested an estimated 250,000 people for political reasons, kept files on about 5.6 million people, and amassed an enormous archive that encompasses 111 kilometers of files in total. It was dissolved on January 13, 1990 (Koehler, 1999).

Headquarters of the Stasi, House 1, was built in 1960-61 as the offices of Erich Mielke, who served as Minister for State Security from 1957 until the end of the GDR. On January 15, 1990, the demonstrators who discovered that Stasi archives were being destroyed occupied House 1 at Normannenstrasse to save Stasi files and make them public. Immediately after, the Central Round Table, a committee made up of representatives of the SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany) and civil rights groups, decided that a "memorial and research center on GDR Stalinism" should be established in House 1. On November 7, 1990, Antistalinistische Aktion Berlin Normannenstrasse (ASTAK), "a grassroots organization founded by members of the citizens' committee and civil rights activists" (Dixon, 2017, p.249), opened the Research Center and Memorial at Normannenstrasse with an exhibition titled "Against the Sleep of Reason".<sup>19</sup> House 1, later named the Stasi Museum, has been open to the public ever since and serves as a research and memorial center.

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<sup>19</sup> Stasi Museum. <https://www.stasimuseum.de/en/enindex.htm> (Accessed: April 2021)

Dixon (2017) states that in the museum, “the visitor is invited to enter the nerve center of the East German secret police and immerse him/herself in the ‘aura’ of the space” (p.255). The museum exhibits all the material elements that Stasi once used for their activities. Besides, in the museum, the offices of Erich Mielke have been preserved in their original forms down to the interiors and even the furnishings. As Dixon argues, in a sense, the museum derives its meaning from the “atmosphere of the preserved authentic space” (Ibid.). These authentic spaces provide visitors an experience of a past suspended in time and place.

The Stasi Museum on Normannenstrasse preserves and conveys memories associated with the GDR. While making a hidden part of the past of the GDR visible, it sustains the elements of the material culture with the task of informing new generations. The museum also adopts collective memory work with an inclusive approach to people who wanted to contribute to the museumification process, both with memories from the past and ideas for the future.



Image 5.10 One of the shelf space with the files of the Stasi, former East German secret police, The Stasi Records Agency (BStU). During the Cold War, Stasi compiled millions of files on ‘suspect citizens’. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2017/feb/22/inside-stasi-museum-in-pictures> (photograph: Tobias Schwarz) (accessed: April 2021)



Image 5.11 Stasi Museum building, available at:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2017/feb/22/inside-stasi-museum-in-pictures> (photograph:  
Felipe Trueba) (accessed: April 2021)



Image 5.12 An office room of Erich Mielke, Stasi Museum, available at:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2017/feb/22/inside-stasi-museum-in-pictures> (photograph:  
Felipe Trueba) (accessed: April 2021)



Image 5.13 Cameras and lenses that Stasi used for surveillance, Stasi Museum, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/news/picture/east-german-secret-police-museum-idUKRTX14NUG> (photograph: Pawel Kopczynski) (accessed: April 2021)

### **5.3 Participatory and Transparent Processes: 23.5 Hrant Dink Site of Memory**

*Agos*, the first newspaper published both in Turkish and Armenian in the Republican period, was founded by Hrant Dink and a group of his friends in 1996 with a mission to render visible the problems of Armenians and other minorities in Turkey. The *Agos* newspaper publishes on issues related to democratization, minority rights, suffering after the 1915 genocide and its effects, coming to terms with the past, pluralism, and the development of a culture of remembrance in Turkey. *Agos* moved its offices to the Sebat Apartment Building in 1999, and over time, the newspaper office has become a gathering place for Armenians of Turkey and abroad, minority members, advocates of human rights, researchers, students, academics, and journalists (Hafıza Merkezi, no date).

Hrant Dink, who was the editor-in-chief of *Agos* since its establishment, had been subjected to hate speech in the national press because of his various writings, and

several trials had been launched against him from 2004 onwards. The starting point for the judicial process was a news report on Atatürk's adopted daughter Sabiha Gökçen published in *Agos* on February 6, 2004, with Dink's signature. In the news report titled 'Sabiha Hatun's secret', it was stated that Gökçen was of Armenian origin and that she had relatives in Armenia. Hripsime Sebilciyan Gazalyan, an Armenian citizen originally from Antep in Turkey, claimed that Gökçen was an Armenian child taken from an orphanage and that she was her niece (Ibid.).

Whereupon the Secretary-General of Turkish General Staff issued a strongly-worded statement and, Dink became a target of a right-wing media campaign with the accusation that "Hrant Dink denigrated the Turkish identity" (Ibid.). A court case was launched against Dink for 'publicly insulting and degrading Turkishness', and he was given a six-month prison sentence. At the first hearing of the court case, nationalist groups filling the hearing room shouted slogans of hate and threat and threw coins and pens at Hrant Dink and his lawyers. Besides, some newspapers continued to target Hrant Dink and *Agos* in articles full of hate speech. Following a period during which he had been the target of nationalist groups, as well as trials, Hrant Dink was shot to death with two bullets in front of the Sebat Apartment Building on January 19, 2007 (Ibid.). The trial of his assassination is still ongoing.

Having become a crime scene on January 19, the Sebat Apartment Building has become "a site of conscience" since that day. Every year on January 19, large crowds gather in front of the building and demand justice for Hrant with the slogan "We are all Armenians, we are all Hrant Dink" (Ibid.).



Image 5.14 ‘Hrant Dink Memorial Stone’ placed on the sidewalk in front of the Sebat Apartment Building, available at: <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/yazarlar/2019/01/13/umuda-sebat-icin-235-nisani-bekleyin> (accessed: April 2020)

In 2007, the Hrant Dink Foundation was set up with the aim of carrying on Hrant Dink’s struggle to develop a culture of dialogue and contributing to Turkey’s democratization process. In 2015, offices of the *Agos* and Hrant Dink Foundation moved from the Sebat Building, and it was decided to turn the former office into a site of memory. And in 2019, after four years of preparation, *23.5 Hrant Dink Site of Memory*<sup>20</sup> was opened to the public with an aim to “help remember the past while shaping the future, establish a platform for dialogue while contributing to mutual understanding, and give hope to its visitors for living together and social peace” (Ibid.). The project team published *Twenty Three and a Half Hrant Dink Site of Memory Preparatory Phase Report* (2018), summarizing how the process worked. Keeping a record of the practices of memorialization and featuring an overview of the concept of memory sites, the report also provides observations on the museums and memory sites in Europe, South Africa, South America, and the United States of America (Ibid.).

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<sup>20</sup> Inspired by Hrant Dink’s article “23,5 Nisan” (23.5 April) published in *Agos*. The title was calling on the people of Turkey “to embrace the sorrow and joy of the past together” in the context of 23 April (National Sovereignty and Children’s Day) and 24 April (Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day) (Hafiza Merkezi, no date).

As stated in the report, the Hrant Dink Foundation describes the preparatory stage as a “learning experience” (Ibid., p.23). To ensure a participatory, democratic, and transparent process, during the preparatory stage, a total of ten dialogue meetings and workshops were carried out with the participation of people of various backgrounds, professions, and age groups and of experts and artists from different disciplines who do work related to memory (Ibid., p.65). In these meetings and workshops, participants made suggestions concerning the themes, exhibitions, visitor and education programs, and materials of the site to be founded. In addition to these meetings and workshops, local and international advisory committees were formed, panels were organized, and memory sites, memorials, and museums in different places were visited (Ibid., p.23, pp. 62-65).



Image 5.15 Objects exhibited at the Hrant Dink Site of Memory following the ‘Memory of Objects’ workshop (Twenty Three and a Half Hrant Dink Site of Memory Preparatory Phase Report, 2018, p.31)

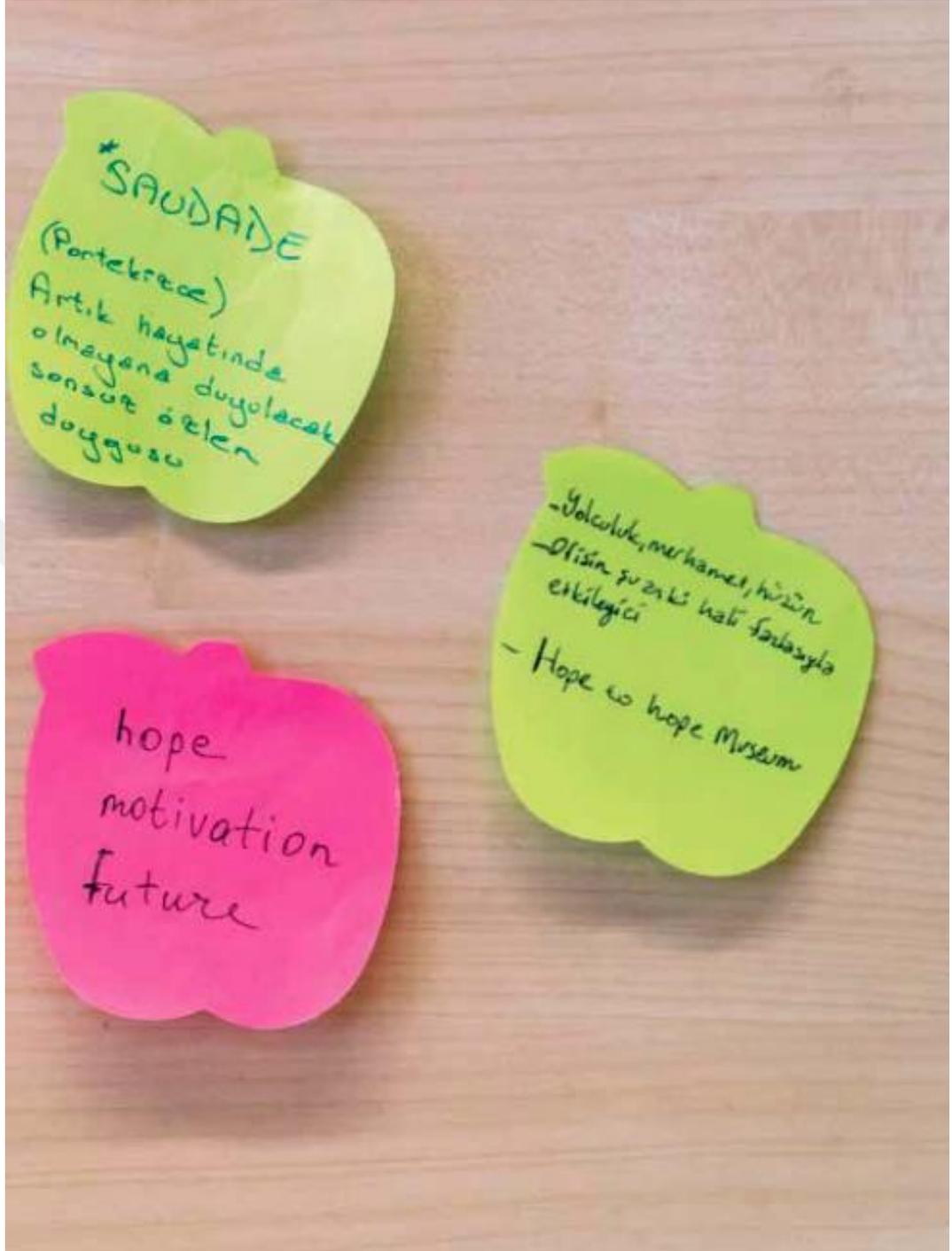


Image 5.16 Proposals of the participants of the dialogue meetings and workshops for the site's name (Twenty Three and a Half Hrant Dink Site of Memory Preparatory Phase Report, 2018, p.77)

In the 23.5 Hrant Dink Site of Memory, as well as “thematic rooms that present Hrant Dink’s life and struggle and important milestones of *Agos*’s social memory”, the artistic memory works are also located (Hafiza Merkezi, no date). One of them is the *Salt and Light* installation located on the balcony to the rear of Hrant Dink’s office. Designed by artist Sarkis “to allow visitors to feel, contemplate and remember”, the installation is based on the metaphor of “creating a diamond from sorrows” (Ibid.). Within the installation, Camp Armen’s<sup>21</sup> plan is represented by a red neon light on the ceiling (*Agos*, 29.04.2019). On the ground, there is an oil lamp that will constantly burn. And in Sarkis’s terms, the red color of the glass of the balcony window expresses “warmth, great emotions”, and the blue color represents “great tranquillity, our whole world” (Ibid.).



Image 5.17 Hrant Dink’s office, 23.5 Hrant Dink Site of Memory, available at: <https://hrantdink.org/en/site-of-memory/about-23-5/story> (accessed: February 2021)

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<sup>21</sup> Also known as Gedikpaşa Orphanage, a former summer camp primarily for Armenian orphaned children in İstanbul’s neighborhood of Tuzla. Hrant Dink was one of the orphans who spent his summers at Camp Armen.



Image 5.18 Hrant Dink's office, 23.5 Hrant Dink Site of Memory, available at: <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/kelebek/hurriyet-cumartesi/hrant-dink-hafiza-mekani-aciliyor-41243965> (accessed: February 2021)



Image 5.19 *Salt and Light*, installation by Sarkis, 23.5 Hrant Dink Site of Memory, available at: <https://hrantdink.org/en/site-of-memory/about-23-5/story> (Accessed: February 2021)

It can be said that 23.5 Hrant Dink Site of Memory embraces processes and research methods based on the sensitivities of a progressive sense of place. The project team considers an existing building as a whole with its different spatial, social, and historical

characteristics and recognizes that “what has come together, in this place, now, is a conjunction of many histories and many spaces” (Massey, 1995, p.191).

#### **5.4 Feminist Pedagogical Approaches: *unEXPOSED?*, İstanbul Women’s Museum**

Operating on a voluntary basis, İstanbul Women’s Museum is the first museum of its kind to be established in Turkey and was opened on September 25, 2012, as a virtual museum with a website (İstanbul Kadın Müzesi, 2011). The museum, dedicated to the more than 2600 years of women’s history in the city of İstanbul, aims to contribute to create an inclusive history of women in Turkey and share this history “as a counterpart to male-dominated historical writing” (Ibid.).

In 2016, during the closing session of the conference of İstanbul Women’s Museum “Women’s Museums: Centre of Social Memory and Place of Inclusion”, a participant “who was looking for ideas for turning the women’s ward of a former prison in Diyarbakir into a museum” asked: “How violent history can be shown without reproducing violence? (...) The women who were tortured in this prison must not be traumatized again. But the violence suffered there and the violations against human rights must definitely be documented. How can this be done?” (Akkent, 2019b, p.124). This question was the starting point for the exhibition “*unEXPOSED?*”.

İstanbul Women’s Museum brought up the question of “how to remember violent history without reproducing images of violence” and sent three questions to women and gender-oriented museums worldwide through the International Association of Women’s Museum (Ibid., pp. 124-126).

Have you ever, in your previous exhibitions, narrated a violent story without using images of violence? If you have, would you like to participate in the exhibition project with a sample comprised of a photo, a text, and an object? What kind of communication did the sample that you have sent initiate among the audiences of the exhibition? (Ibid., p.126).

Six women’s and gender museums, including Frauenmuseum, Museum Frauenkultur Regional-International, Global Fund for Women, Group Women and Museum

Switzerland, Museo delle Donne, and Kvinnemuseet responded to the request and took part in the exhibition *unEXPOSED?*. These museums sent 13 samples dealing with the “destruction of nature, violence, processes of persecution, mass murder, forced disappearances and structural violence against asylum seekers” that had been used in their exhibitions in previous years (Ibid.). As Akkent states, the samples sent by the museums were concrete examples of practices of remembrance demonstrating “how one can approach the individuals concerned with respect and how one can talk about hurtful memories by showing empathy to and acting in solidarity with these people” (Ibid.).

**İfşa Etmeden?**

**20 Ekim—20 Kasım 2018 ■ Ziyaret saatleri: Her Çarşamba 14.00—15.30**  
Randevu alınması rica edilir +90 212 244 05 03  
Adres: Getronagan Ermeni Lisesi, Kemeraltı Cad, Sakızcılar Sok. No: 1

**20 October—20 November 2018 ■ Visiting hours: every Wednesday 14.00—15.30**  
Please request appointment: +90 212 244 05 03  
Adress: Getronagan Armenian High School, Kemeraltı Cad, Sakızcılar Sok. No: 1

**unEXPOSED?**

İfşa Etmeden? sergisi, 18–20 Ekim 2018’de İstanbul Kadın Müzesi (İKM) ve Su Gender ortaklığı ile İstanbul’da yapılan Feminist Pedagoji: Müzeler, Hafıza Mekânları, Hatırlama Pratikleri – I. Asya ve Avrupa Kadın Müzeleri Konferansı kapsamında, İKM tarafından hazırlanmıştır.  
The exhibition *unEXPOSED?* was produced by İKM within the context of the conference *Feminist Pedagogy: Museums, Memory Sites, Practices of Remembrance – 18th Asian and European conference of women’s museums* organized by Women’s Museum Istanbul (İKM) and the SU Gender on 18–20 October 2018 in Istanbul.



Image 5.20 Announcement for the exhibition *unEXPOSED?*, İstanbul, 2018, available at: <https://feministpedagojikonferansi.wordpress.com/> (accessed: April 2021)



Image 5.21 A scene from the exhibition *unEXPOSED?*, İstanbul, 2018, available at: <https://iawm.international/october-2018-first-regional-asian-european-iawm-conference/> (accessed: April 2021)

The exhibition accompanied the 1st European-Asian Women’s Museum Conference, “Feminist Pedagogy: Museums, Memory Sites, Practices of Remembrance”<sup>22</sup> and ran for four weeks at the Getronagan Armenian High School. For the exhibition, under the guidance of the İstanbul Women’s Museum, students and teachers of the Getronagan High School developed and implemented a special museum education program comprising a set of questions helping the visitors to perceive the exhibition in an interactive way. The set of questions used by the students in the museum education program included questions such as:

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<sup>22</sup> Hosted and organized by İstanbul Women’s Museum and SU Gender in İstanbul in 2018. Conference blog: <https://feministpedagogikonferansi.wordpress.com/> (Accessed: April 2021)

What does the word violence mean to you? Which story in the exhibition exemplifies your thoughts?

Whats topics do you prefer not to talk about? In which environments? Have you come across any of these topics in the exhibition?

Which painful event in your country is important for you? Which example resembling this event could you give from the exhibition?

How would you feel if pictures of violence were shown when talking about an issue which involves violence? How did you feel when looking at the photographs and objects in the exhibition? (Ibid., p.130)

During the exhibition period, the students who prepared the questions for the educational program also offered guided tours for school classes and adult visitors. After the exhibition was over, in accordance with the ‘sustainability and ‘environmental protection’ approach of İstanbul Women’s Museum, it was offered as a gift to Sabancı University (Ibid., p.122).

As Akkent argues, the exhibition *unEXPOSED?* might be considered as an example of applied feminist museum pedagogy (2019b, p.128). Feminist pedagogy is a gender-based tool providing an opportunity “to discuss multiple oppression and discrimination processes, to make them visible, to enable learners and teachers to be aware of authoritarian tendencies, to emphasize the emotional dimension of learning, to gain skills to produce and apply alternatives” (Akkent, 2019, p.10). And the exhibition, through its initial question of how to remember violent history without reproducing images of violence, the content provided by the women’s and gender museums, and the educational program developed and implemented by the students, exemplifies a feminist pedagogical approach to practices of remembrance. In this sense, İstanbul Women’s Museum exhibition *unEXPOSED?* resonates with the sensitivities of a progressive sense of place. Embracing collectivity to reject heroic male figures and their dominant narratives in the field of memory, it recognizes the “simultaneous coexistence” of women with “their own trajectories and their own stories to tell” (Massey, 2005, p.11).

## 5.5 Mobilizing Memory: Karakutu Memory Walks

Karakutu Association was founded in January 2014. As one of its founding members, Emrah Gürsel, states, Karakutu<sup>23</sup> “is an organization that was founded on the idea that the state and society cannot become democratic because of Turkey’s lack of concern for the main reasons behind the violence and injustices that have been going on for the last one hundred years” (Hafıza Merkezi, no date). Working to develop a critical eye towards the past and “raise voices of the alternative narratives that were suppressed by the official history”, Karakutu aims to “introduce different perspectives about the past to society, especially to youth” (Karakutu, 2019a). The association conducts memorialization projects for/with young people, trainings, and meetings in the area of dealing with past and intercommunity historical dialogue projects (Ibid.).

To bring together the fields of dealing with the past and youth studies, Karakutu developed the “Memory Walks” methodology. The Memory Walks may well be considered as a commemoration event “in which young people are ‘explorers’, instead of being ‘students’ or ‘tourists’, thanks to the unorthodox methods that are employed” (Hafıza Merkezi, no date). The walks aim to make young people raise awareness to say ‘never again’ by facilitating critical thinking against the dominant historical narratives through the alternative stories of places. The Memory Walks are centered around the difficult topics of the past and allow young people to learn and discuss through experience, together with their peers (Ibid.).

Before the walks, capacity-building activities such as seminars on historical issues, local history workshops, one-on-one support groups, and meetings with human rights organizations are held for the young volunteers. Then, the young volunteers conduct research to gather facts, narratives, testimonies, visual materials, and statistical data on ‘places of memory’. These places may memorialize the struggles of groups whose rights were violated or the survivor’s struggles for ‘truth’. At the end of the training sessions,

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<sup>23</sup> ‘Black box’ in English: A usually complicated electronic device whose internal mechanism is usually hidden from or mysterious to the user. Broadly, anything that has mysterious or unknown internal functions or mechanisms (Merriam Webster). <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/black%20box> (Accessed: April 2021)

the young volunteers become the narrators of memory walks (Hafiza Merkezi, no date; Karakutu, 2019b).

During the walks, the participants split up into groups and use the ‘treasure hunt’ method. They decipher the passwords related to the history and stories of the places that are “highly illustrative of systematic discrimination and rights violations against minorities, women, LGBT individuals, and dissident groups” (Hafiza Merkezi, no date). When they arrive at the place, the participants listen to the ‘silenced stories’ of that place from the young narrators waiting for them there. The narrators also make connections between different stories. For instance, at Aras Publishing House, the narrators tell the story of Zabel Yesayan, who dealt in her writings and novels with the women’s rights and socialist struggle. Yesayan’s story “is also a means to talk about genocide, tehcir law, exiles or the fate of Armenian intellectuals who survived the genocide” (Ibid.). The Memory Walks also provide participants with the opportunity to re-discover the city and historical, socio-political, economic dynamics that have an impact on it. At the end of the walk, participants share their experiences about the walk and discuss how to remember violations of human rights and injustices and confront them.



Image 5.22 Scenes from the discussion session of the Memory Walks, available at: <https://memorializeturkey.com/en/memorial/katakutu-memory-walks/> (accessed: April 2021)

Today, the routes of Memory Walks include Beyoğlu, Şişli, Cağaloğlu, Beşiktaş, Yeldeğirmeni, and Balat, which are mixed themed routes and, Sultanahmet which is a gender themed route. And since 2018, walks are also being held for adults (Karakutu, 2020).

Through the lens of a progressive sense of place, the walks imagine space as the sphere in which multiple trajectories coalesce (Massey, 2005, p.9). The walks challenge dominant narratives and histories, and forms of power that foster them by recognizing that the story of a place cannot be told as the story of the ‘one’. Grounding on difference and heterogeneity, they mobilize the collective memory of silenced individuals and places.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I discussed a number of spatial practices of memorialization from Turkey and the world. Now, I want to discuss memorialization in Yassıada in consideration of the cases I provided. Such a discussion may seek an answer to the question of how a memorialization project could reflect sensitivities of a progressive sense of place.

The case of the Berlin Wall exhibits the roles of public actors in the memorialization processes. The architectural and artistic interventions regarding the Wall are based on public competitions initiated by public actors and developed and implemented by various actors. The Stasi Museum on Normannenstrasse provides an aura of authenticity. All the material elements that Stasi once used are exhibited in their preserved original forms in the museum. As stated in their preparatory phase report, the project team of 23.5 Hrant Dink Site of Memory searched the experiences of sites of memory dealing with difficult pasts in different places and shared these experiences with the public via organized meetings and workshops, and panels. Since no similar project exists in Turkey, 23.5 Hrant Dink Site of Memory may inspire other memorialization practices with its participatory and transparent processes. İstanbul Women’s Museum exhibition “*unEXPOSED?*” exemplifies a feminist pedagogical approach to practices of remembrance and memorialization. It embraces collectivity to

reject heroic male figures and their dominant narratives in the field of memory and creates a common ground for sharing and experiencing. Motivated by the necessity of a critical eye towards the past to confront difficult pasts, Karakutu Memory Walks pursues other ways of doing in the field of memorialization. The walks unfold the alterities of pedagogies in memorialization practices by blending memory and youth studies. Through the walks, the collective memory of silenced individuals and places mobilize. In this way, walking around the city's streets becomes a tool to resist dominant narratives of memory generated by power.

To illuminate how all these memorialization practices reflect sensitivities of a progressive sense of place, it would be useful to take a closer look at Democracy and Freedom Island. First of all, Democracy and Freedom Island is a project of the state since President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is recognized as the originator of the project. The only available information about how the memorialization process worked is that the project was prepared by Justice and Development Party deputy chairwoman Çiğdem Karaaslan and carried out by MESA Holding, a construction company, and the concept of the island was created by Outdoor Factory. Although the events Yassıada witnessed exist in the collective memory, it seems that during the memorialization process, neither public-official bodies nor private-commercial ventures took into consideration the wide range of meanings Yassıada conveys for different actors. And as a result of this memorialization process, Democracy and Freedom Island today hosts “a 23-room congress hotel and a 500-person congress center, as well as mosques, monuments, squares, viewing terraces, horizontal elevator, wharf administration, and crisis management structure, welcoming reception area, helipad, restaurant, and staff dormitory, and management building” (Directorate of Communications, 2020). During construction work, many structures on the island, such as military garrison, courtroom, pier, the building where the defendants stayed, were demolished despite their witness to the island's memory (Bilgin, 2020). The project on the island repairs materiality, but at the same time, it also impairs memory. In a sense, this state project invites one to forget the last material traces of the events Yassıada witnessed. However, without expecting a remarkable architectural production, even preserving the island just as it was would have kept its aura.

Second, although memorialization practices may vary from memorials, parks, museums, and sites of memory to pedagogic and educational activities and exhibitions, the museumification has been regarded as a sine qua non for the memorialization of Yassıada. Yet, Democracy and Freedom Island, the museumified island, is a place where a certain history and memory are frozen and imposes a singular narrative of memory. As well as being extremely documentary and didactic, the museum spaces of the island are also degendered. The Democratic Party had female members of the parliament who were trialed in Yassıada (Tuna, 2018). However, through the exhibited masculine and hierarchical narratives, the memories and stories of women disappear in Democracy and Freedom Island.

As a concluding remark, I may argue that Democracy and Freedom Island reduces Yassıada's socio-political significance to clean-cut and brand-new structures, freshly painted walls, wax sculptures, and replicas of the objects. The project singularizes the island and closes down the possibility for alternative voices to be heard. Closed to a multitude of memories and experiences, the project paves the way for a new kind of forgetting both through destruction and renovation and top-down strategies implemented.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Yassıada has failed in the sense of being a place contributing to the practices of confronting the coup era of Turkey while preserving all its natural, cultural, and historical assets. In this study, to examine the reasons behind this failure, I first depicted the difficult past of Yassıada: The first coup d'état of the Turkish Republic and the Yassıada trials. While accounting for the coup and the subsequent trials, I realized that what happened on May 27, 1960, was a progressive revolution rather than a coup for the students in Ankara and İstanbul, the intellectuals, and the left-wing of Turkey. Here I argued that the attitudes of these actors towards a coup and subsequent trials which led to the execution of a prime minister, a foreign minister, a finance minister paved the path for today's symbolic conflict in Yassıada.

Following what is evoked by this symbolic conflict, in Chapter III, I investigate the recent spatial transformation of Yassıada along with the competing discourses and claims of different actors associated with the island. Analyzing the positionalities of the selected actors, namely the Young Civilians, representatives of the ruling Justice and Development Party, and Islands Defense, I observed a conflict as to which and whose memory/heritage was worth accentuation and appreciation in the representation of the place: On the one hand, a political organization and a neoliberal-populist government who imagine the island as a place of sacred political memory, and, on the other hand, urban movements who put forward an image of the island as a natural, historical site of heritage. I argued that these actors' discourses and claims about the essential nature of Yassıada open the way to a reactionary sense of place since they singularize the island and close down the possibility for alternative voices to be heard. And lastly, I argued that a progressive sense of place, which avoids homogenizing the diversity and heterogeneity of place (Massey, 1991), would provide a forum for negotiations across multiple identities of Yassıada.

In Chapter IV, which deals with the memorialization in Yassıada, I focused on the ways in which Democracy and Freedom Island relate to the past. Utilizing Eco's (1989)

notion of openness, I conceptualized the memorialization in Yassıada as a closed process that rejects the addressee's involvement in the process. I argued that Democracy and Freedom Island is one of the embodiments of the counter-memory of the JDP.

In Chapter V, I discussed a number of spatial practices of memorialization from Turkey and the world in order to draw attention to alternative ways of memorialization beyond single-sighted approaches to the history and identity of place. I included cases that are prominent in terms of architectural and artistic interventions, the authenticity of place, participatory and transparent processes, and that unfold the alterities of pedagogies in memorialization practices. In consideration of these cases of spatial practice, which shed light on sensitivities of a progressive sense of place, I observed that the memorialization in Yassıada was indulging a new kind of forgetting both through destruction and renovation and top-down strategies implemented with a reactionary sense of place.

In this thesis, by putting together relevant political, social, cultural, economic, and environmental trajectories and relations that constitute Yassıada, I tried to provide a relational understanding of place. I believe that a progressive sense of place that forms the backbone of this thesis offers a framework for understanding built environments and their different spatial, social, and historical characteristics as a whole. A progressive sense of place may challenge the single-sighted and essentialist approaches in the field of architectural and urban studies by revealing which histories, which memories, which identities these approaches exalt by excluding which histories, memories, and identities. It may embrace the multiple voices of a place, the meanings a place assumes in different periods. As Doreen Massey writes in 'Places and Their Pasts' (1995, p.190), this sense of place does not mean that "any new future for a place, any proposed development, is equally acceptable, that no positions can be taken, no political judgements made". Rather, conceiving the place from a progressive point of view provides important means in arguing such cases (Ibid.).

I hope that this discussion on Yassıada through the lens of a progressive sense of place may help us try alternative policies that do not neglect the consequences of the practices of political violence in the past and generate a sense of place, which is open to the wider

world. And considering my own research just as one of the narratives that are possible to tell within its own limits, I hope that further research including and articulating other relationalities over Yassiada can be conducted.



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