



Grassroots Responses to Enforced Disappearances in Turkey:

Saturday Mothers/People

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The case of the Kurdish Conflict

- 1984-present (PKK-Turkish state)
- Modern Turkey (1923) a nation-state to create a homogenous Turkish nation (Jongerden, 2017)
- Turkification of all peoples: assimilation of Kurds, elimination of a distinctive Kurdish identity
- 1990s peak of state violence in the Kurdish region
- Enforced disappearances & extrajudicial killings & forced displacement
- Mass political mobilisation of Kurdish people, including the victims of state violence
- Saturday Mothers/People as a response to enforced disappearances in 1995



Saturday Mothers/People



27 May 1995: the beginning of a long-lasting social movement

human rights activists and the relatives of the disappeared

silent sit-ins in Galatasaray Square every Saturday

truth, justice, and accountability for the enforced disappearances

commemorating those who were disappeared

1999-2009: a decade-long break

the most systematically organised victim group in Turkey

| Building an Organised Victims Movement

- How could organised victims mobilise the goals of transitional justice and build a sustainable movement?
 - The format of the gatherings: silent sit-ins, non-violence, use of photos
 - Independence from political organisations
 - The image of mothers as ideal/innocent victims: Saturday Mothers/People?

the focus of the movement clear from other influences and not let it be instrumentalised or criminalised



mothers as ideal/innocent victims

- **the image of grieving mothers** has been the common thread underlying the movement's tools and strategies that ultimately brought about a **wider support and visibility**
- Assumed innocence and legitimacy of mothers
- mothers as innocent victims who are politically neutral, and whose pain is legitimate and relatable.
- **the emphasis on the motherhood category** runs the risk of silencing other victims whose identities or experiences could be deemed less legitimate
- Assigning **moral values to certain types of victimhood categories** inevitably results in the exclusion of so-called less morally acceptable victims from rights and benefits.
- **a nuanced understanding of the construction and complexities of victimhood** is imperative to have an inclusive transitional justice process that will be responding to the demands of a broad range of victims



How did they contribute to transitional justice?



Justice



Guarantees of non-recurrence

Truth



Memorialisation



TRUTH

Truth seeking

Demands for a truth commission for conflict related HRVs

Official recognition of the act of enforced disappearances

Denial → invisibility → being heard

Truth-recovery

Testimony sharing

A public platform to share experiences of loss and pursuit of justice



Justice

Justice-seeking

Unanswered attempts

Prosecutions in the 2000s

“Dealing with the past trials”

for exhumations, the opening of mass graves and death wells

1st time for families to see perpetrators as defendants

Public discussion around 1990s’ state violence against Kurds

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DARGEÇİT KAYIPLARI



DARGEÇİT JİTEM DAVASINDA MAHKEMENİN İNSANLIĞA KARŞI İŞLENMİŞ BU AĞIR SUÇUN SANIKLARINI HAKKANİYETE UYGUN BİÇİMDE YARGILAMASI TALEBİYLE BULUŞACAĞIZ.

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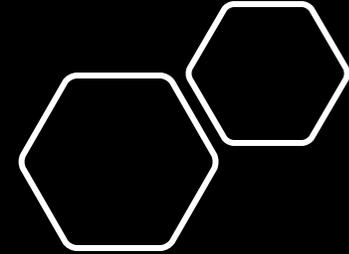
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Guarantees of Non- recurrence

Preventive Role

- “the preventive potential of interventions at the societal level” (de Greiff, 2015)
- Deterrent effect

- Intergenerational aspect
- Persistence, pain, collective struggle



Memorialisation processes

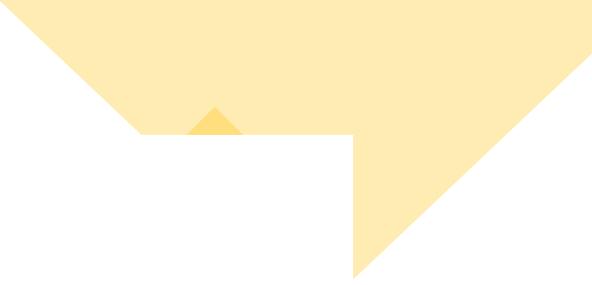
impact on wider society

- commemorative vigilance
- Galatasaray Square as “a site of memory”
- Enforced disappearances known by a wide audience

Impact on the movement

- Publicly embracing and honouring the memories & political struggles of loved ones
- Healing memory work
- A sense of empowerment and solidarity by using the public space to demand justice and accountability (Hamber, 2015)
- transforming the individual stories of loss and pain to collective struggle



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- “Actually, I have always fought for my dad. But after I joined them [Saturday Mothers] I started to fight for everyone. In fact, I started to forget the issue of my dad a little bit. Because, it is actually very interesting, you give up on chasing the problems about yourself. Because the pride of doing a collective work is something very different (Interview no:21).”
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