

Duygu Erbil

The Making of a Young Martyr: Discursive Legacies of the Turkish “Youth Myth” in the Afterlife of Deniz Gezmiş

When it comes to the memory of political events, there are few points of reference as ubiquitous as 1968. Whether constituted from manning the French barricades of May 1968, marching in the U.S. civil rights movement, or demonstrating in the Prague Spring, the idea of 1968 allows social movements and time periods to coalesce under one temporal marker that symbolises a period of world-wide political unrest. 1968 is a transnational “site of memory” (Nora 1989), a historical reference point subject to contestation over its meaning and subject to dynamics of cultural remembrance that shape both the meaning of 1968 and subsequent protest cultures. The year symbolises both the formation of a political generation of so-called *sixty-eighters* and the discursive formula of “youth in revolt”. The cultural remembrance of 1968 imprints images of youth as a political category onto modern protest cultures: the memory of the young people of 1968 is instructive for youth cultures in the present. This first chapter sets the overall context for the so-called Turkish sixty-eighters. This will be followed up by Lucie G. Drechselová who delves deeper into one aspect of the case, namely the gendering of youth activists’ memory in Turkey.

Although the “youth in revolt” formula was a transnational phenomenon, historically contingent conditions and their discursive legacies have shaped different images of politicised youth. Simon Reid-Henry writes that the year 1968 was “on one level a demographic event: a glorified coming of age party for the first generation of a mass higher-education society. And the where of 1968 is in this sense as important as the what.” (2019, 41) This question of “where” is central to the study of cultural memory, for memory is constituted by situated remembrance practices. The discourse of protesting youth in Turkey, too, was deeply influenced by memory of the *sixty-eighters*, but the remembrance of this generation has coalesced around the memorability of a young “martyr”, Deniz Gezmiş. Gezmiş, an urban guerrilla and Marxist-Leninist student leader, was executed by the state (alongside his comrades Yusuf Aslan and Hüseyin İnan) in 1972. But his cultural afterlife has been mediated and remediated in countless cultural artefacts from life writing to fictional television series; from protest songs to graffiti. To this day, Gezmiş serves as a cause and a model for Turkish youth political participation, whether the young politicians are Kemalists or Marxist-Leninist militants, due to his afterlife’s availability as a reference point.

Informed by the cultural turn in social movement studies (Williams 2004, 91–97) and recent interest in the dynamics of collective memory and contentious politics (Daphi and Zamponi 2019), I examine the function of cultural memory in constructing youth as a contentious political category by studying Deniz Gezmiş’ afterlife. Above all, I ask: how has Gezmiş’ afterlife been made available and how has it facilitated a discourse of youth as a political category to be appropriated by successive generations in Turkey? First, I outline the “memory-activism nexus” (Rigney 2018) and memory work’s role in structuring the “cultural environment” (Williams 2004, 91) that shapes and is shaped by collective actions. I read cultural memory as a domain of “discursive legacies” (Coy et al. 2008) that define the boundaries of social and cultural practices of contention.

Focusing on two texts that have become central to the cultural remembrance of Deniz Gezmiş – lawyer Halit Çelenk’s *1. THKO Case (Court File) (1. THKO Davası [Mahkeme Dosyası], 1974)* and poet and journalist Nihat Behram’s *Three Saplings on the Gallows (Darağacında Üç Fidan, 1976)* – I analyse the dominant framing of youth in memory of activism in Turkey during the 1970s, asking how this framing positioned Gezmiş as the representative of youth politics against state oppression and thus mediated Gezmiş’ lived experience into a resonant cultural resource for political socialisation. I conclude that Çelenk’s work, which compiles documents from the court case that saw Gezmiş and two comrades executed, took advantage of the availability of judicial records as resources for memorialisation to publicise a story that had been censored; Behram’s work was one of several which drew on the availability of the legal record to melodramatically poeticise Gezmiş and his comrades as representatives of revolutionary youth.

1 Memory and activism

Research on the role of social and cultural remembrance practices in contentious politics has developed to explore “the symbolic dimension of collective action” (Daphi and Zamponi 2019, 400). Scholars of social movement studies have addressed collective memory to understand the cultural capacities and constraints of collective identity formation (Anton 2016, 131) and recognised collective remembrance as a practice that establishes social movement continuity and legitimacy (Tarrow and Tilly 2007, 441; Gongaware 2010, 215). In turn, a growing scholarly interest in the role of memory in activism has proliferated the study of the “memory-activism nexus”, a systematic approach to the interplay between “memory activism”, “memory of activism” and “memory in activism” (Rigney 2018, 372).

Memory activism – “strategic commemoration of contested pasts” for political purposes (Gutman 2017, 19) – has produced the prolific cultural afterlife of Gezmiş. Memory activism, indeed, sustains the remembrance of state violence against revolutionaries through practices like annual protest commemorations or commemorative cultural production. Such sustained remembrance has in Turkey proved paramount for successive political movements and for political socialisation itself. The afterlife of Gezmiş functions as a common reference point for opposition to the state at both national and subcultural levels. For example, Gezmiş’ image adorned the façade of the Atatürk Cultural Center during the Gezi park protests marked by ideological heterogeneity as a recognisable reference to the memory of past activism. His image also acts as a resource for subcultural collective identity, for various Marxist, guerrilla, and youth groups that draw on memory of Gezmiş to legitimise their movements.

The availability of memory as a cultural resource *in* activism depends on the memory work of political movements. The limits of this memory work, however, are defined by the wider cultural environment, which determines the intelligibility and legitimacy of cultural repertoires (Williams 2004, 102). Memory work’s “resonance” establishes this dynamic between internal memory culture and external cultural environment (Armstrong and Cragge 2006, 726). In the Turkish context, then, the resonance of Deniz Gezmiş as the symbol of contentious youth determines the degree to which new generations can appropriate the counter-memory of the 1960s/70s to define their own contentious political identity.

The extent to which Gezmiş has become a reference point for youth politicisation is immediately observable on the level of slogans employed by revolutionary and socialist youth organisations such as “Now we shall be Deniz” or “Our promise to the Denizes is revolution”.¹ Yet, what is obscure in this observation is the way Gezmiş’ afterlife has been predicated on its resonance with the Turkish “youth myth” (Lüküslü 2009). The youth myth suggests that Turkish youth played a major role in the formation of the Turkish state, identifying young people as the “symbol of the republic” (Lüküslü 2009, 14–15). On the one hand, cultural and political actors’ appeal to this “youth myth” was a facilitative factor in Gezmiş’ memorability by virtue of its resonance with the national cultural environment. On the other hand, this appeal reveals the discursive constraints of remembering the young revolutionary, given it channels the “discursive legacy” (Coy et al. 2008) of the masculinist and militarist definition of youth as determined by the “youth myth”.

¹ Due to Gezmiş’ metonymic function standing for other executed revolutionaries or martyrs of the era, the name Deniz frequently appears in the plural to refer to “Deniz Gezmiş and his friends”.

2 Historical context and the discursive legacy of the “youth myth”

The formulation and reformulation of youth as a political category has been a crucial discursive mechanism throughout the history of modern Turkey.² In Turkey, the discourse of youth marked social movements even in the late Ottoman era, as is apparent in the names of the Young Ottoman and the Young Turk movements (Neyzi 2001, 416). Kemalist state ideology defined youth as “the guardians of the regime” (Neyzi 2001, 416) and established the political category of youth as the “constructors of the new Turkish state” (Lüküslü 2005, 31). Ironically, youth’s privilege as a political category – or the Turkish “youth myth” to use Lüküslü’s term (2009) – became the chief discursive resource for the 1968 student movement, which mobilised youth on grounds of protecting the Kemalist regime: “In fact, the youth of the 1960s and 1970s are still loyal to their mission as a vanguard. The difference is that the formal government is seen as illegitimate, and in referring to the war of independence, youth sees its duty in fighting an ‘illegitimate’ regime.” (Lüküslü 2005, 33)

The formation of youth as a political category simultaneously depends on the nation-state’s practice of addressing youth politically and on the young generation’s self-recognition as the agent of Kemalist revolution. However, during the late 1960s era of heated youth movements, young Turkish political actors were labeled “anarchists” by the political elite and mass media – and, eventually, criminalised by the 1971 Turkish military memorandum. The ultimatum of 12 March 1971, although addressed to Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel, targeted “anarchy” on the streets by demanding the formation of a credible and robust government that could end the political chaos caused by polarised youth in Turkey, and “carry out reforms ‘in a Kemalist spirit’” (Zürcher 1993, 258). The public discourse of “anarchy” referred to the radicalising student movement that was embedded in a network of political violence constituted by left and right-wing militantism during 1969 and 1970. In spite of the threat from both left and right, Turkey’s “high command by this time was mesmerised by the spectre of a communist threat” (Zürcher 1993, 258). When the National Security Council proclaimed martial law in eleven provinces on 27 April, a “witch-hunt” targeted leftist intelligentsia and students under the aegis of an anti-terror campaign (Zürcher 1993, 259).

² Neyzi divides the construction of youth in public discourse into three historical periods: the representative of the nation between 1923–1950; “rebels” and “a major threat to the nation” between 1950–1980 due to violence between left and right-wing student groups, and “apolitical consumers” after the 1980 coup d’état (2001, 412).

In a nationwide surge of arrests, “Deniz Gezmiş and his friends” – that is, the People’s Liberation Army of Turkey (THKO) – became the country’s “most wanted” for bank robbery, kidnapping U.S. Sergeant Jimmy R. Finley and four American privates, and most importantly, expanding urban guerrilla warfare to rural areas to “overthrow the constitutional order” and establish a “Marxist-Leninist regime”. When he was finally arrested, Gezmiş was already a prominent public figure. Thus, when the THKO case began on 16 July 1971, to be concluded with the death sentence handed to 18 young revolutionaries, it immediately became known as the “Deniz Gezmiş Case”. Gezmiş’ role as a metonym for the 24 THKO members on trial was propagated even by the defence lawyers, who referred to “Deniz Gezmiş and his friends” in their appeals to the prime minister, the military commission and the Turkish Bar Association (Çelenk 1974, 16, 111, 27). The trial marked the institutional practice of martial law attempting to erase the political privilege of youth as “the guardians of the regime” (Neyzi 2001, 416), which undermined in turn the role of the military as the state guardian.

The “Deniz Gezmiş Case” crystallises the cultural memory of youth as a political category. It emerges as the martial law’s institutional practice of denouncing the discourse of youth as a privileged political category and situates cause lawyering and testifying at court as counter-practices that draw on the Turkish “youth myth” and the nonaccountability of youth as an impulsive, adventurous, inexperienced and innocent social category. I will show how Gezmiş’ memorability and symbolic status as the face of revolutionary youth was facilitated by these institutional counter-practices as they responded to the legal processes of martial law and its media in an attempt to navigate questions of culpability, responsibility for political action and the mechanisms of accountability for political violence.

3 Framing culpability, framing youth

Gezmiş was eventually executed during a period when coverage of activism was heavily censored. Journalism was censored during the case, while the leftist intelligentsia risked incarceration for making public comments about Gezmiş. Nonetheless, the Gezmiş trial was heavily documented. The law that sought to silence the event also functioned as a domain of remembrance, since “legal trials also serve as bookkeepers of history” (Savelsberg and King 2007, 193) and materialise collective memory in judicial textualities (Sarat and Kearns 2002, 12). The Gezmiş case is a strong example of the “regulation of mnemonic content by law” through production and dissemination of legal narratives (Savelsberg and King 2007, 197). As a

result, a trove of legal documents relating to the trial has long been a central point for commemorative practices.

The “mnemonic capacity” of activists (Armstrong and Crage 2006, 726), in this context, was dependent on their ability to make use of such materials by accessing the legal archive, rendering it legible, and reframing it to remember revolutionaries not as criminals but as “martyrs”. Cause lawyer Halit Çelenk played a crucial role in increasing this capacity by taking up a brokering position between the judicial and cultural fields. The publication of Çelenk’s compilation, *1. THKO Case (Court File)*, would break the silence imposed by martial law by publishing court documents, both the accusation and defence, as a tactical navigation of legal restraints. Çelenk’s revealing work would become a significant “revolutionary legal monument of ‘68” (Targan in Çelenk 2013, 5).

More importantly, *THKO Case (Court File)* made public the institutional contestation over the discourse of youth as a political category, suggesting that it was the youth movement and the radicalisation of youth itself that had been on trial. In the book, the trial of Gezmiş and 23 other “guerrillas” counterintuitively emerges as a political contestation over the discourse of youth as a political category, and not as a legal process per se. For example, far from being a judicial accusation, the indictment starts by providing an epic historical account of “turning points” in history, such as “tribes finding their national identity”, “Judaism and Christianity”, the emergence of Islam, and “the conquest of Istanbul” (Çelenk 1974, 37). Setting the scene of “the birth of a nation” in the “universal social order” of nation states preconditioned by monotheistic religions protecting the “oppressed” (37), the militant-nationalist narrative voice of the indictment frames history through wars.

The indictment reads as a national security mission statement. A militaristic mythologisation of history proceeds for fourteen pages before listing the actual events at the centre of the trial. The prosecutor first links the “wars as history” narrative to international post-war developments: “In Europe, a youth that wanted to live free was coming into existence. First, they were against authority. They wanted a natural life away from society’s oppression, girl and boy together [. . .] they were destroying and attacking.” (38) The prosecutor summarises the 1968 movement across the world and subsequent left-wing militancy to argue that radicalism was successfully contained in the west, but in “backward countries, especially in South America and Arab countries, an utterly different wind started to blow, Marxist-Leninist principles [. . .] were adopted by a certain coterie” (38). The ambiguity of a “certain coterie” seems to allude to the Cold War rhetoric of the “red scare”, with an added Turkish nationalist twist. Despite the Marxist-Leninist “air” blowing in the world, the prosecutor continues, Turkish “people were spiritually ready and determined not to submit to

foreign desires” (39). Instead of a text conditioned by judicial episteme and legal discourse, the indictment is a nationalist agitation defining the trial as a military mission.

The prosecutor’s narrativisation of history then becomes even more convoluted. He praises the 1960 coup – the so-called “27 March revolution” – and positions university students *acting in unity* as a major force in this Kemalist “revolution” against the right-wing Democrat Party government. Drawing on the youth myth, the prosecutor deduces that *someone* from the Democrat Party had advised its descendant Justice Party to “Divide youth!” (44) to secure power. While the young Turkish generation was traditionally supposed to be the bearer of national identity and the guardian of the state, the 1968 youth are accused of betraying Atatürk: “They only embraced his Mustafa Kemal side. Atatürk has been bourgeoisified after taking this surname.” (51) For the prosecutor, the youth of the present have lost their “national sentiments” after this mystified division, while language became contaminated by “so-called Turkish words” translated from western Marxism (47). Moreover, he states, the “Turkish nation, which presents a unity in terms of ethnicity, has been wanted to be divided” by recognising Kurdish identity (49). Once the constructor and protector of the nation state, the Turkish youth is now a major representative of the loss of national identity.

The logic of this accusation is structured by the “youth myth”, hence the division of youth into left and right represents the entire nation’s division: when leftist students let the Kurdish identity “rise from the dead” (49), they also supposedly divided Mustafa Kemal and Atatürk. However, youth’s agency was not the cause of these ruptures: “Now, every revolutionary man was a SOSO, KOMO, GUEVARA, every revolutionary woman was a PILAR, a KURUPSKAYA [sic]. Their Lenin was waiting in ambush, their Plekhanov was watching his work of art.” (52, emphasis in the original) Marxism-Leninism stole the Turkish identity of the youth. Here, the national security and Cold War narrative intersect with the myth of Turkish youth to suggest that Gezmiş and his comrades represented a particular threat: they are both influenced by non-Turks and have, in effect, become non-Turks. After his mythologising account of the “de-turkification” of the nation’s youth, the prosecutor gives a detailed inventory of the actions of the THKO and adds an enumerated list of individual charges (77–83). This list of legal violations, however, is not what the defence contests.

The prosecutor’s reference to the Turkish youth myth determines the defence’s response: both sides are guided and limited by the discourse of youth as an idealised political category. Instead of addressing any criminal charges, the defence engages with the prosecutor’s idealisation of Atatürk’s youth by reframing the defendants’ actions as a second war of independence, this time fought

against American imperialism in the aftermath of World War II: “Exactly 42 years ago Mustafa Kemal Atatürk unfurled the flag for this fight. Today the young generations happen to believe in fighting this fight.” (114) Responding to the prosecutor’s deployment of both the national security narrative and Kemalist discourse of national independence, the defence lawyers deploy their own rhetorical weapon, connecting the memory of the radical Marxist-Leninist movement in Turkey with Kemalism and invoking the Turkish youth myth themselves. The defence suggests that the THKO revolutionaries and the army are equally opposed to the right-wing government. They accuse the government of violating the constitution and endangering Turkey’s economic independence, citing evidence such as an import/export table illustrating national debt (164). However, the defence’s attack on the government itself is built chiefly on a detailed retelling of the narrative of the youth movement in Turkey and the network of violence it was embedded in. As the lawyers put on record the ways in which the government violated human rights and human dignity by torturing activists, we see a judicial form of memory activism.

After noting the inclusion as evidence of photographs and medical expert testimonies on the use of torture (186), the defence lawyers embark on a section given the title “YOUTH AND ITS DUTY” (186, emphasis in original). The section begins with a long quote from Atatürk’s controversial Bursa Speech, which positions Turkish youth as “the owner and the guardian of the reforms and the regime” (186). The quotation is followed by a reference to Atatürk’s Speech to Youth, which assigns the duty of defending Turkish independence to the nation’s young people (187). After this direct appeal to the Turkish youth myth, the lawyers summarise the youth movement of 1967–1969, noting in particular that the movement began with university occupations (190–194). The defence’s inclusion of a detailed chronological table of the era’s student protests marks this section as a mediation of the memory of activism. By including this information, the defence positions Gezmiş and his THKO comrades – most of whom were university students – as Atatürk’s national guardians, repudiating the prosecutorial attack on the defendants as anti-Turkish security threats.

The defence lawyers continue to use this form of chronological judicial recording to document losses of the movement by listing the “revolutionary youth” confirmed killed by the riot police and right-wing nationalist commandos (207). They list twenty-three separate incidents, starting with the “first martyr” (207), Vedat Demircioğlu. By mobilising revolutionary discourse through key words such as “martyr” and “Bloody Sunday”, which had become a site of memory for the international revolutionary struggle (see Rigney 2016), and detailing causes of death like “killed with a gun” (Çelenk 1974, 208, 209), or “died of haemorrhage for not being hospitalised on time” (212), the lawyers inscribe anti-activist violence into the court record. This act of judicial remembrance

establishes a discursive juxtaposition between the anti-Kemalist government's crimes and a Kemalist THKO fighting for Atatürk's revolution. The THKO's representation inscribed in the judicial archive resonates with national Kemalist sentiments.

The dialogic space between the prosecution and the defence, therefore, creates the institutional conditions for the memorability of the criminalised youth movement as the prosecution and the defence take their positions in the contestation over the militaristic national memory and the Turkish youth myth. Deniz Gezmiş uses this dialogic space to give a rhetorically powerful and tactical speech, which is included in the "Hearings" section of *THKO Case (Court File)*. His positioning in this memory contestation facilitates Gezmiş' own memorability, as he speaks from the subject position of contentious youth. The staying power of this speech is apparent in the way it has become an important textual resource for the monumentalisation of Gezmiş as the symbol of dissident youth to the present, circulating in whole or part on everything from postcards to songs. Gezmiş' self-representation marks a discursive shift on youth as a political category, not contested by the older generation in the courtroom, but self-identified as a revolutionary subject position, albeit within the constraints of the youth myth.

Gezmiş uses his hearing in court to have his protestations against the court inscribed in the record, framing his dissent as an analytical critique:

First of all, I have words to say against the indictment. The indictment is baying for blood. The analyses made are wrong, erroneous; the evaluations are also inaccurate. However, we have dedicated our existence to the Turkish people without expecting any return. For this reason, we do not hold back from death. (Çelenk 1974, 319)

The self-sacrifice discourse here references a line from the student oath that was recited daily in schools until 2013: "My existence shall be dedicated to Turkish existence." The subject position of contentious youth in this speech is constructed both by a mnemonic reference to the student oath and a defiant historicism that critiques the prosecution's parlous historical analysis of the student movement. Gezmiş' Marxist-historicist rhetoric would find resonance in his counter-memory work.

The speech does not defend the THKO and its radicalisation. Rather, it produces – and has recorded – a counter-memory of the student movement in Turkey as more radical and historically rooted than the global 1968. Gezmiş argues that the student movement began not in 1968 but before the 1908 Young Turk Revolution, with medical students protesting Sultan Abdul Hamid II (321). By embedding the THKO in a student movement that started in the Ottoman era, he creates a memory of activism that both fits into and moves beyond nationalist

discourse. This negotiation with national memory does not sacrifice radicalism even as it seeks to incorporate elements of the institutionalised discourse of Turkish revolutionaries as nation-builders.

Gezmiş' history of Turkish independence, indeed, is both shared by and opposed to the military commission that sentences him to death: his production of counter-memory is not an attempt to erase the army's narrative but to radicalise it. He explains that Ottoman courts gave the death sentence to those who wanted to fight in the Independence War (320) and transcribes a historical lineage of Turkish revolutionaries leading from the Turkish National Movement directly to the THKO:

In Istanbul in the 1920s the Karakol organisation's Group M fired bullets at the British and Ottoman police for whatever purpose, we fired bullets at the police for that same purpose [. . .] During the First War of Independence, Kuvâ-yi Milliye [National Forces] kidnapped the son of the governor of Izmir, Rahmi bey, and took 50 thousand gold coins. We are just as right to do this as them. *History will absolve us* just as it absolved those who did this before. (Çelenk 1974, 324–325, italics mine)

Gezmiş' testimony historicises the THKO's law-breaking by referencing illegal and revolutionary aspects of Turkish nationalist history. The young defendant draws anti-imperial parallels between the Marxist-Leninist movement and the Turkish National Movement's battles with the Ottoman Empire. By doing so, he frames Kemalist sentiments as *revolutionary* sentiments. Indeed, he goes on to suggest that the guerrilla warfare of the present is a war of independence that echoes the Turkish Independence War. Gezmiş draws on national memory but also amplifies its purportedly forgotten revolutionary dimensions. Quite intriguingly, he also draws on the transnational memory of the Cuban Revolution by alluding to Castro's iconic court defence that was published as the manifesto of the 26th of July Movement, "History Will Absolve Me", which also draws on the memory of the Cuban War of Independence. Just like Castro's, his defence and counter-memory production seek to absolve THKO not in the court of the martial law, but in the court of history: Gezmiş' youth is idealised and not morally culpable for any violence. They are Kemalists, but also Marxists-Leninists who lay claim on Castro's legacy.

Gezmiş' words in court deliberately appeal to the militaristic definition of youth as the protectors of Turkish independence. His self-framing as a young martyr is encapsulated in one widely disseminated quote: "And I am honoured to dedicate myself to Turkey's independence at the age of 24. We will uphold the idea of independence until the grave." (331) Gezmiş' reference to the Turkish student oath, his defiant rather than defendant mode of address and his rhetoric of political self-sacrifice make the court speech available for further commemorative practices. Navigating the rhetorical spaces between the prosecution and defence's opposing

versions of nationalist history establishes Gezmiş' resonance with the youth myth, but his position in this resonant discourse is one of youth in dissent. The speech crystallises a subject position of contentious youth that can be adopted by later generations. On the one hand, it constructs a self-image of revolutionary youth to be adopted by leftist subcultures in Turkey. On the other, its resonance within the nationalist cultural environment makes the afterlife of Gezmiş available for appropriation even by ultranationalist organisations like the Youth Union of Turkey, despite the controversy that Gezmiş' last words included the line: "Long live the Turkish and Kurdish peoples' fight for independence." (Çelenk 2002, 86) His memory remains open for contestation.

4 Affective framing of youth

While facilitating Gezmiş' cultural memorability, Halit Çelenk's publication of *THKO Case (Court File)* was not sufficient to disseminate the discourse of idealised contentious youth— especially in the 1970s, when state propaganda depicted the youth movement as anarchist and Gezmiş as a criminal. The book's judicial discourse and format seems hardly to be addressed to the average reader. However, in an era when it meant incarceration or exile to commemorate Gezmiş and his comrades, Çelenk provided a legal means to remember the THKO, to be appropriated by other cultural actors. The most circulated memory works from the 1970s – Nihat Behram's *Three Saplings on the Gallows*; Erdal Öz's *Deniz Gezmiş Speaks (Deniz Gezmiş Anlatıyor, 1976)* and Burhan Dodanlı's *Gallows (Darağacı, 1978)* – used elements from the legal archive to produce literary journalism that memorialises "Deniz Gezmiş and his friends". These literary-journalistic works summarise and selectively quote from court documents, but expand the "human interest" narrativisation that Çelenk initiated by including personal letters, life stories and engaging literary reflections. They thus combine legal and poetic modalities to (re)frame the execution of the "three saplings" within the moral illegitimacy of the military commission, which has murdered three "children".

Behram's *Three Saplings*, which was published originally as a series of articles in the newspaper *Vatan* to contest the legitimacy and legality of the executions, led to serious trouble for the author despite his use of judicial documents. His work was banned and later, he was expatriated by the 1980 military junta (Behram 2006, 204). At stake for the state was its moral legitimacy, challenged by Behram's testament to young death as universal injustice. The book was written in Çelenk's line of cause lawyering that aimed at publicising law's crisis of

legitimacy: along with the use of court documents, Behram includes legal expert testimonies at the end of the work. However, this judicial discourse is aided by an affective and moral framing of the law's crisis of legitimacy, which emphasises “children” and “youth” themes.

Behram's emphasis on youthfulness in the face of death has a “melodramatic” function that “dramatises and makes manifest a moral configuration where innocence is pitted against culpability, right against might, citizenry against the state, hope against its destruction” (Rigney 2016, 90). He introduces the execution itself in this melodramatic modality: the three revolutionaries die “when the sum of their ages was less than the sum of the number of their friends that had already died” due to countless political murders (Behram 2006, 4). In this literary witness account, the “very young” THKO members are “light headed” (21) as they enter the court; Gezmiş, İnan and Aslan wait for execution in a manner “so young, so curious” (43). When the three friends embrace each other for the last time, they look at each other with a “lively smile” that conveys “a childish, humoristic subtlety” (57). Throughout the work, these moments of poignant melodrama juxtapose youth and death, drawing on the notion of the innocence of youth to add an affective layer to the legal configuration of the nonaccountability and inculpability of the revolutionaries. In other words, the ethos of the law is rendered legible and morally recognisable by the pathos of youthful death. The Gezmiş case is made even more memorable with the addition of emotional appeal: the metonymic relation between Deniz Gezmiş and youth gained cultural staying power as successive cultural actors – Behram is just one typical and well-known example – made such melodramatic modality the norm. As emotion embraced and reconfigured legal text, the youthful image of Gezmiş became more and more collectively resonant.

5 Conclusion

In Turkey's era of censorship, traumatised democracy, political violence and coups d'état, remembering dissident youth movements was criminalised. However, the Deniz Gezmiş case was made publicly available thanks to Halit Çelenk and the literary journalists who published and reframed official narratives of Gezmiş. Mobilising the legal archive of evidence and testimony marked the court as a site of memory production. However, the most intriguing aspect of this legal archive – both on the military and opposition sides – is its deliberate and profound resonance with the Turkish “youth myth”. The discourse of youth as a political category is evident in the prosecutor's descriptions of youth's division into right and left, in the defence lawyers' language and in

Gezmiş' own words in court. The court's collection of evidential texts – ranging from speeches to photographs – created a legal archive of contested images of youth as a political category. When that archive was more or less unavailable, Halit Çelenk's capacity to broker between the judicial and cultural fields in *1. THKO Case (Court File)* paved the way for successive memory agents to continue the debate over the questions of culpability for revolutionary action and the legitimacy of Gezmiş' execution.

The memorability of Deniz Gezmiş himself, however, was enhanced by the work of literary journalists. A succession of writers framed the inculpability of youth through the moral legitimacy of mourning premature death. Adopting a melodramatic modality assisted, as I have shown, Nihat Behram and others, to establish a metonymic relation between Gezmiş and youth beyond the political discourse. We can thus speak of a double movement in the monumentalisation of Gezmiş as the political symbol of Turkish youth: the discursive legacy of the Turkish “youth myth”, as staged in the juridical setting; and the resulting shift of the image of youth from being one of privilege to one of contention. As a result, Gezmiş has come to represent in Turkey the very idea of youth in dissent. Gezmiş' perpetual youthfulness, on the other hand, is created by the melodramatic configuration of the memory of his execution. In turn, this vindicates the image of youth as a contentious political category. The afterlife of Gezmiş has thus proliferated widely as a cultural resource for youth political socialisation in Turkey, mediating various forms of youth dissent and conveying the memory of the Turkish 1968 movement, albeit setting some limits to the cultural memorability of the youth movement. As Lucie Drechselova shows in this volume, the hegemonising success of the discursive legacy of the militarist and masculinist “youth myth” in activist memory work resulted in the exclusion of stories that did not resonate like Gezmiş', which created a gender divide in remembering activism.

Bibliography

- Anton, Lorena. “Cultural Memory.” *Protest Cultures: A Companion*. Eds. Kathrin Fahlenbrach, Martin Klimke, and Joachim Scharloth. New York: Berghahn Books, 2016. 130–136.
- Armstrong, Elizabeth A., and Suzanna M. Crage. “Movements and Memory: The Making of the Stonewall Myth.” *American Sociological Review* 71.5 (2006): 724–751.
- Behram, Nihat. *Darağacında Üç Fidan*. Istanbul: Everest Yayınları, 2006.
- Çelenk, Halit. *1. THKO Davası (Mahkeme Dosyası)*. Istanbul: Yöntem Yayınları, 1974.
- Çelenk, Halit. *1. THKO Davası (Mahkeme Dosyası)*. Ebook edition, 68'liler Yayınları, 2013.
- Çelenk, Halit. *İdam Gecesi Anıları*. Istanbul: Tekin Yayınevi, 2002.

- Coy, Patrick G., Lynn M. Woehrle, and Gregory M. Maney. "Discursive Legacies: The US Peace Movement and 'Support the Troops.'" *Social Problems* 55.2 (2008): 161–189.
- Daphi, Priska, and Lorenzo Zamponi. "Exploring the Movement-Memory Nexus: Insights and Ways forward." *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 24.4 (2019): 399–417.
- Gongaware, Timothy B. "Collective Memory Anchors: Collective Identity and Continuity in Social Movements." *Sociological Focus* 43.3 (2010): 214–239.
- Gutman, Yifat. *Memory Activism: Reimagining the Past for the Future in Israel-Palestine*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2017.
- Lüküslü, Demet. *Türkiye'de "Gençlik Miti": 1980 Sonrası Türkiye Gençliği*. Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2009.
- Lüküslü, Demet. "Constructors and Constructed: Youth as a Political Actor in Modernising Turkey." *Revisiting Youth Political Participation: Challenges for Research and Democratic Practice in Europe*. Ed. Joerg Forbrig. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2005. 29–35.
- Neyzi, Leyla. "Object or Subject? The Paradox of 'Youth' in Turkey." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33.3 (2001): 411–432.
- Nora, Pierre. "Between memory and history: Les lieux de mémoire." *Representations* 26.9 (1989): 7–24.
- Reid-Henry, Simon. *Empire of Democracy: The Remaking of the West since the Cold War*. London: John Murray, 2019.
- Rigney, Ann. "Differential Memorability and Transnational Activism: Bloody Sunday, 1887–2016." *Australian Humanities Review* 59 (2016): 77–95.
- Rigney, Ann. "Remembering Hope: Transnational Activism beyond the Traumatic." *Memory Studies* 11.3 (2018): 368–380.
- Sarat, Austin, and Thomas R. Kearns. "Writing History and Registering Memory in Legal Decisions and Legal Practices: An Introduction." *History, Memory, and the Law*. Eds. Austin Sarat and Thomas R. Kearns. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2002. 1–24.
- Savelsberg, Joachim J., and Ryan D. King. "Law and Collective Memory." *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 3 (2007): 189–211.
- Tarrow, Sidney, and Charles Tilly. "Contentious Politics and Social Movements." *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics*. Eds. Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. 435–460.
- Williams, Rhys H. "The Cultural Contexts of Collective Action: Constraints, Opportunities, and the Symbolic Life of Social Movements." *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*. Eds. David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi. Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishing, 2004. 91–115.
- Zürcher, Eric Jan. *Turkey: A Modern History*. London: IB Tauris, 1993.